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FALLEN FORTUNES.

FALLEN FORTUNES.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "WALTER'S WORD," ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. I.

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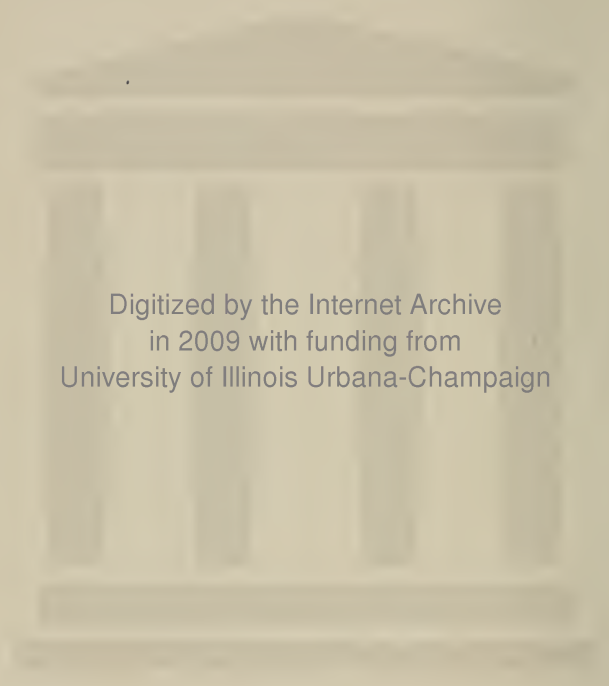
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FALLEN FORTUNES.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER THE CHARADES.

It is night, and the moon is rising over crag and coppice in its fullness, making all things, as is commonly said, "as light as day." Its silent, silvery splendours do not, however, vie with the golden glories of noonday, but have a radiance of their own, infinitely more enchanting as it gleams on wood and wave. Never does Nathay look so charming as when its smooth, swift stream mirrors the moonbeams, or steals coyly from them in eddy and pool beneath its bush-fringed banks. Never do the tall crags of Bleabarrow stand so grandly out as beneath this harvest moon. How distinctly does every giant boulder assert itself, every heather-clad knoll, and every mountain ash that leans aslant out of its rocky cleft, like a flag at a ship's

stern in calm ! To one who observes her closely, Nature has at this time a listening air ; the giant boulders, in their statuesque magnificence, seem to be awaiting something, the utterance, it may be, of some magic charm that shall confer a wondrous transformation ; the ash is leaning and listening ; even the tufts of heather stand stiffly up, as though in expectation. If he be alone in such a scene, Man himself mechanically listens also ; and to some a voice is vouchsafed—uncertain, vague, yet pregnant, so it seems, with eternal mysteries ; and by others there is no sound heard, save the whisper of the wind among the trees, or the murmur of the stream as it hurries to the fall.

“Listen, Kitty, listen ! Is it not pleasant to hear the Nathay tumbling over the weir in a night like this ?”

The speaker is a plump, fair girl in a house-maid’s dress, who is standing at an open window of a mansion commanding a view of the weir, and she addresses one of her own age and sex who is leaning over the window-sill beside her. To judge from the attire of the latter, which is a neat and cheap one, such as is bought for solid merit, as respects its washing qualities, rather than for pattern and texture, and by the little apology for a cap, made out of imitation lace, that crowns

her rich brown hair, you would conclude her to be of the same station as her companion ; but Kate has an air of refinement that the other lacks. They are both, however, what even bachelors, who have arrived at the critical age, would term pretty girls ; and if Mary (for that is the speaker's name) is inclined to be stout, that is no defect, so far as my poor judgment goes, in a pretty housemaid, but generally bespeaks content and good-nature. She is evidently one of those who do not "work their fingers to the bone" in the performance of her household duties, for her hands are smooth and delicate, while it is equally plain that her occupation lies within doors, for her complexion is as soft as cream, and almost as white. Her neck, too, though marred by the presence on either side of it of a large blob of mosaic gold in the shape of an earring, is free from roughness or sunburn ; and its delicacy contrasts prettily enough with the gay cotton handkerchief pinned above her bosom, in that old-world modest fashion which is rarely seen in these days, even when modesty is affected, as upon the stage. Upon the whole, we would say that Mary is a superior young person in her rank of life, and that her mistress is an easy one, and leaves her plenty of leisure to adorn and preserve her charms ; and woe be to the susceptible head

gamekeeper (one would go on to prophesy) who, in his watchful rounds to-night, should behold that pleasant vision as she gazes out on Nathay's stream and crags. Kate, like Mary, is a *blonde*; but the resemblance between the girls goes no further. She is a year or two younger than her companion—indeed, unusually young for one in domestic service—and has an air of delicacy so pronounced, that it only just falls short of the appearance of ill-health. Her cheek-bones might be termed too high, and her frame too angular, if it were not that Nature has not yet done with her. Her beauty is at present in the budding stage, though it gives promise of great perfection; and her eyes are too soft and spiritual, one would say, for the task of looking for cobwebs or dusting china. If she is to be up betimes to-morrow, and go about her work as usual, it strikes one that they ought long ago to have been closed in sleep, instead of looking on rock and river with such a thoughtful and impassioned gaze.

“You hear the weir, don't you, Kitty,” continued Mary; “though it seems you don't hear *me*?”

“A thousand pardons, Polly. O yes, I hear it well enough, and I heard your question too; but, somehow, on a night like this, one likes to think, and not to talk. It was very selfish of me not to

answer you ; but I was wondering how long you river had run on like this, how many generations of men and women had listened to it, and how many more will do so, when you and I shall have no ears for its ceaseless song."

"No ears, dear Kitty ? what a funny notion ! Oh, I see ; you mean when we shall both be dead."

"Yes ; dead and gone, Mary. The moon will shine as calmly as it does now, yonder, glistening on those crags we know so well ; the sky will be just as blue and beautiful ; the trees will be even grander and larger ; but we shall never see them more."

"Well, of course not ; we shall be enjoying something better in heaven—at least I hope so."

"Do you really hope so, Polly ?" asked the other earnestly ; "or is it only that you hope you are not going to the bad place ? I cannot help thinking that we often pretend we want to go to heaven, when we have in reality no expectation of the sort."

"O Kitty, how can you be so wicked ?"

"But is it not wicked to pretend such things ? It seems to me to be attempting to deceive not only ourselves, but Him who made us. Now, on a night like this, and looking on so fair a scene, I almost feel as if I *was* in heaven ; as though, at

all events, I was not of the earth—earthly—but was projected somehow—I don't know how—into some diviner sphere. There seem influences about us such as are not perceived at other times, if they then exist; a sort of communion appears to be established between our souls and Nature herself——”

“You are ‘projecting’ me, dear Kitty,” interrupted the other, laughing, “very much beyond my depth: for my part, I am quite content to leave speculation alone, or, where there seems a hitch, to trust to the clergyman.”

“That is because you are conscious of being so comfortably located, that the very idea of change, even in one's ideas, annoys you. From your cradle to your grave, you will, in all human probability, be out of the reach of adversity; and therefore this world seems sufficient for all your wants, if not ‘the best of all possible worlds.’”

“For that matter, you will be just as well off as I, Kitty.”

“So far as material wants are concerned, I suppose I shall; but I cannot shut my eyes to the position of those who are less favoured by fortune. I often wonder if one were poor, and looked down upon (as poor people are, whatever we may say), and conscious of injustice and contempt, whether

one's views of the future would not be altered as much as one's views of the present. It seems to me that it is much easier for the rich to be what is called orthodox—to pronounce whatever is to be right, and to take matters as they find them mapped out for them, both here and hereafter—than for the poor.”

“Yet I am sure some of our poor people here—I mean of those that belong to the estate——”

“A very different thing from the estate belonging to *them*, Polly,” interrupted her companion drily.

“Of course it is. Providence has placed them in a subordinate position; but yet they are often better people—I have heard the rector say so—and more religious-minded, than their masters. They are ill-lodged and ill-fed, rheumatic, and Heaven knows what else; but yet they never complain, nor seem to think it hard though they see others so much better off.”

“Still, I confess I should feel it bitterly, Polly, if I were in their place,” answered the other earnestly. “I am afraid I should be a radical and an infidel, and all that is bad.”

“Well, then, I am very glad that you are not likely to be exposed to the temptation, cousin,” was the laughing reply. “If your papa gets into

Parliament, he is quite clever enough to become a Minister, and then you will be a great lady; when you will soon get rid of all these socialistic sort of ideas, and begin to patronise us all."

"Patronise!" exclaimed Kate; "that is another thing that seems to me to embitter the position of the poor almost beyond endurance. There are people in our class even who seem to imagine that they have bought their fellow-creatures out and out—body and soul—with a few yards of flannel, or, very literally, a few 'messes of pottage.' Even if they had settled a comfortable annuity upon their unhappy victims, they could not have the right to treat them as they do; but to have bought them so cheap, and then to give themselves such airs of proprietorship, is to my mind a very offensive spectacle."

"My dear Kitty," cried the other, laughing, "if you are not of a more 'umble' spirit, and do not feel more grateful for your perquisites than your language seems to promise, you will never get an 'upper' situation. . Even as it is, you know, it was noticed by Mr. Holt in the charade to-night that you looked above your place."

"I daresay I should be very unfitted for it," was the grave rejoinder, "as well as for anything else that was really useful. I often wonder——"

"What is the good of it? You are always wondering, Kitty," broke in the other girl.

"I can't help it; and I have heard it said that wonder is a stepping-stone to understanding. I say I often wonder, if papa and mamma were to be ruined, what use I could possibly be to them. How could I get my own bread, even, except by the very occupation we have been playing at to-night—that of domestic service? As to going out as a governess, for example, what qualifications do I possess for such a post?"

"Oh, *that* is no obstacle, my dear Kitty, for I have had half-a-dozen governesses, and not one of them knew what she proposed to teach."

"Well, I told you I thought it wicked to 'pretend,' and so I do; so that the profession of teaching would be out of the question, so far as I am concerned. What on earth, then, should I do if I was penniless?"

"I will tell you. You would send an unpaid letter to Miss Mary Campden, Riverside, Bleabarrow, Derbyshire, telling her how matters stood; and as soon as steam and wheels could take her, she would be with you; and this would be her answer: 'Come to Riverside, Kitty, and for the rest of your life make it your home. We have always been sisters at heart, though only cousins

by birth; let me now prove how much I love you.' ”

As Polly said these words, her pretty face was lit up with the brightest of smiles, and her voice had quite a touch of generous welcome.

“My dearest Polly, how good you are!” said Kitty.

“And you *would* come to me, would you not, and make this your home for life?”

“Well, you see, there would be papa and mamma, and poor Jenny and Tony. I could never leave them, and live in luxury, while they were poor.”

“But we should never let them be poor, of course; I mean my papa and mamma would not permit it. Even if you were not, all of you, the dearest friends we have in the world, blood is thicker than water, and has indisputable claims.”

“Then how is it that neither your people nor mine ever take any notice of Uncle Philip?”

“O Kitty, you must not speak of him; indeed you must not. He is not your uncle at all, you know, legally. He is a person whose name should never be mentioned; at least by young girls like you and me. We ought not even to be aware of his existence.”

“But since we are aware?”

"Well, then, we should ignore it. It is your duty, even more than mine; for if the law had decided otherwise than it did, your papa would have been disinherited, and this man Astor would have succeeded to your grandfather's property."

"But this man Astor, as you call him, is my uncle, nevertheless," persisted Kitty; "and it was not his fault that his mother was not my grandmother."

"What a funny child you are! Of course it was not; but a great many people in the world are victims to misfortune. It is the will of Providence. Why, it's in the Bible itself, Kitty, that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on their children."

"I know it is; but it seems very hard, for all that."

"But that is very wicked, Kitty."

"What! to pity Uncle Philip? Then I hope I shall be always wicked."

Here there was a little pause. Mary knew by experience that it was idle to argue with her cousin upon general principles, and at once descended to particulars.

"I have heard that Mr. Astor is a bad man; dissipated and untrustworthy; a sort of person quite certain to go to the dogs."

“Who told you that?”

“One who knows him better than anybody, because he has more to do with him; one, too, who is a great friend of your father’s, and a warm admirer of yourself, so that you should receive his opinion with respect on all accounts.”

“I would not believe everything Mr. Holt says, if you mean him,” observed Kitty quietly; “and even if he be right in this case, Uncle Philip is still to be pitied. I saw him once by accident when I was quite a child; so like in face, and even in voice and manner, to his brother, dear papa, and yet so different in their positions in life.”

“They are different every way, Kitty, if you only knew them better,” answered Mary gravely. “Mr. Astor is a *mauvais sujet*, a *vaurien*. Mr. Holt tells me he is about to leave England for good and all, to try his fortune in the New World; and from what he said, I am confident that that will be a happy thing for all parties.”

“That is what people always say when they have contrived to shake some responsibility off their shoulders,” said Kitty.

“Nay, Mr. Philip Astor is certainly no responsibility of ours, at all events,” observed Mary quickly.

"I was not thinking of Uncle Philip just then, Polly."

"Ah, you were thinking of Geoffrey. Well, of course I regret that mamma should have expressed herself in those terms to-night about him: but it cannot be expected that the lad should live at Riverside all his life; and since he has a fancy for the sea, why should he not indulge it?"

"But he has no such fancy; it is only that he feels himself a burden—or rather, he is made to feel it——"

"I don't see that, Kitty; indeed, I don't," interrupted the other, sharply.

"Then you must be stone-blind."

"Oh no; it is merely that I look at him with ordinary eyes, and don't make a fool of the boy by pretending to be in love with him."

"No; you conceal your affection for him very well, it must be confessed."

"I wish I could return the compliment, Kate. You make yourself quite conspicuous by your attentions to that young lad. It is a very mistaken kindness in you—to say the least of it. If you mean nothing by it, it is an act of cruelty to him; and if you do mean anything, Geoffrey Derwent has scarcely a shilling he can call his own, and is not the sort of character to make a fortune, so that he will never be in a position to marry."

“I think this discussion is uncalled for, cousin,” answered Kitty, drawing up her slight figure to its full height.

“You provoked it yourself, Kate, by reflecting upon mamma’s conduct to Geoffrey; and while we are upon the subject, I would recommend that when your father comes to-morrow, you should be a little more discreet in your behaviour, for he has quicker eyes than your mamma, who has not such a knowledge of the world——”

“My mamma knows all that she needs to know, though she knows nothing bad,” interrupted Kate, in indignant tones; “she is not only the best, but the wisest of God’s creatures in all that He deems to be wisdom; and I would rather have her good opinion than that of all the world beside.”

“My dear Kitty, I never uttered one word against her, nor have ever dreamed of doing so, so you need not be so fiery in your championship; whereas you did reflect upon the conduct of my mother as respected Geoffrey; she is not so fond of him as you are, but she has done her duty by him—and more than her duty—for the last ten years.”

“Till at last she is getting a little tired of it,” observed Kate coldly.

“You have no right to say that, cousin; Geoffrey

has been brought up like one of the family—just as though he had been my own brother ; and yet he has no natural claim upon us——”

“For shame, Mary!” interrupted the other indignantly. “How can you talk like that? Do you suppose I don’t know how it all came about? How old Mr. Derwent was your father’s dearest friend, and put him on the road to fortune, though he lost all himself. No natural claim? Is gratitude, then, contrary to nature?”

“What! do you call my father ungrateful, you who know that Geoffrey has been educated entirely at his expense?”

“Heaven forbid! He is the most kind and generous of men; but I honestly tell you that I think he has done no more than his duty in paying for Geoffrey’s schooling. Why, I have heard him say myself—and I honour him for it—that he owes all he has in the world to old Mr. Derwent; and what is Geoffrey’s schooling out of your papa’s ten thousand a year? Why, not so much as he pays to his second gardener! I think it unworthy of you, Mary, to adduce such a thing as evidence that the poor boy has nothing to complain of, in the teeth of the scene we witnessed to-day; I do, indeed.”

“I think that mamma was a little hard upon

Geoffrey, Kate," answered Mary slowly; "but not so hard as to evoke such indignation on your part. Of course if, at seventeen, the young gentleman is your accepted lover, you have every right to be in a passion; but otherwise, you had better have been silent—at least to my mother's daughter."

"I am not in a passion even *now*, Mary; though what you have just said was designed to put me into one. If I know myself, I should have been just as angry to have seen any other person in a dependent position so contemptuously treated as Geoffrey was; but if I have said anything disrespectful of your mamma to you—though I am not aware of it—I am very sorry for it. It was altogether wrong of me, and would have been so had I so spoken of her to anybody—far more to you. Mrs. Campden has been always most kind to me, I'm sure; and a kinder hostess to us all it is impossible to picture."

"Of course she is, because she loves you all; not that she does not love Jeff too; only she has such a notion of discipline, and of boys making their own way in the world. I think the only exception is your Tony, whom she certainly does spoil; but nobody can help spoiling Tony. How you will miss him, when he goes to Eton in October!"

“Yes, indeed; and how dear mamma will miss him, and above all, poor Jenny! Something to love and cling to, and pet, seems absolutely necessary to her existence. She is herself so dependent on others, that to have some one about her dependent upon *her*, is an especial delight. Papa says she has taught Tony far better than his masters have done, and that he has got into the upper school at his entrance examination—he is but nine, you know—has been more owing to her than to them.”

“What a clever family you all are, Kate!” observed Mary, admiringly; “I am quite surprised that everybody is not afraid of you, instead of you being such favourites. I suppose it comes from your having such a clever papa. I sometimes think that if I could wish my papa to change in anything—which I don’t—I should like him to talk, and laugh, and make everybody admire him, as yours does. Is he always in as high spirits at home as he is everywhere else? I need not ask if he is as good-humoured. I cannot imagine Mr. Dalton put out by anything.”

“Well, I don’t say papa is never put out,” said Kate, laughing for the first time, as though the topic of talk had begotten merriment; “but he is so soon all right again, that we rarely notice that

there has been any interval of gloom. We have not seen so much of him at home of late, as usual, and we miss him sadly. I am sure, so far as mamma and we are concerned, we would much rather that he was not made a Member of Parliament, for that will take him more away from us than ever."

"Oh, but then think of the position, Kate, and the great things to which, in his case, it may lead."

"I am afraid I am not ambitious, Polly," sighed Kate; "and from what I have seen of ambition in papa's case—that is, since he began to sit on 'Boards'—which, however profitable, must be very uncomfortable—and to take the chair at this meeting and that, and to busy himself in public affairs, I think it would have been better for him to have remained as he was."

"But the law was not to his taste, Kate; and though it is true he had a competency of his own, it seemed like hiding his candle under a bushel to remain a briefless barrister all his days. If I were you, I should be so proud of him."

"You cannot be more proud of him than I am, Polly, or so proud as dear mamma is; but for the reasons I have mentioned, I regret, and so does she, I know, though she would never confess it, that he is standing for Bampton. Since he wishes it,

we prefer, of course, that he will succeed; but so far as we are selfishly concerned, if he fails to do so it will be no disappointment."

"Oh, but he will not fail; he is far too clever, and he has laid his plans too wisely for that; and though it will cost him a good deal of money, it is most important to his interests—so Mr. Holt assures me—to secure a seat."

"Mr. Holt seems to have told you a good deal; I wish he would mind his own business. It is he who persuades papa to 'go into' this and that, as he calls it, and tells him of 'good things,' which I fancy don't always turn out as good as they look. Mamma dislikes the man, I know, and distrusts him."

"But then dear Mrs. Dalton is not a woman of business."

"I don't know about business, Mary; mamma is the best manager of a household I ever knew, which is woman's business, I suppose; and as to people, though she does not talk much, and never says an uncharitable word, her instincts are always right; and in this case my own agree with them. I don't admire this Mr. Holt at all, and am very sorry your good father asked him down to Riverside, at least while we were stopping with you. I am not proud myself, you know, and care very

little what occupation people follow, so long as they themselves are nice ; but I am surprised that Mr. Campden should have so ‘cottoned,’ as Jeff calls it, to a man like that, who is also, I believe, a stock-broker.”

Not a word was spoken for some moments ; nothing was heard but the murmur of the weir, and the melancholy tuwhit-tuwahoo of the owls, as they called to one another across the unseen mere above, from which it flowed ; then once more Mary broke silence with : “What *is* a stockbroker, Kitty, dear ?”

If she had asked, What is a stock-dove ? the inquiry would have been pertinent enough to such a scene ; but as it was, the question was so ridiculously inappropriate, that Kitty broke into a silvery laugh that woke the echoes ; it also awoke some one else, for a window was thrown up, immediately beneath that which the two friends occupied, and a thin but decisive voice cried : “Mary, your father says that there must be no more charades if they lead to all this discussion afterwards between you girls ; I must insist upon your going to bed.”

“Indeed, Mrs. Campden, I am afraid it was my fault, not Mary’s,” answered Kate penitently from above.

“No, no ; I know it is not you, Kitty. Mary would sit up all night, and perhaps be no worse for it ; but you are much too delicate for such imprudences——”

“I’ll have both those young hussies discharged in the morning,” broke in the bass notes of the exasperated Mr. Campden ; “their tittle-tattle robs me of my beauty sleep.”

“What a nice dear old thing your papa is !” laughed Kate, as she and Mary softly closed their window, and prepared to divest themselves of their borrowed plumes. “If I was a housemaid, and he in the same service, I should certainly set my cap at him.”

CHAPTER II.

TEACHER AND PUPIL.

THERE are, no doubt, attractions of a sentimental kind that cling to fine old country houses, with which no other habitations can compete. "I like your England only pretty well," observed an American lady to me on one occasion; "but I do love her ruins." Historical association was what her own land did not possess, and she valued it accordingly; and, indeed, it has charms for most of us. It is something to dwell under the same roof which has sheltered Queen Elizabeth in her progress, or Charles II. in his wanderings; and perhaps even to sleep in the same bed that was once occupied by the Royal Martyr. But there are objections to these stately ancestral homes, which make them more pleasant to "go over" as a tourist, with a half-crown in your hand, destined for the housekeeper, than to reside in as a guest. The rooms are stuffy, and the ventilation most

observable in draughts under the doors ; the windows are small, and do not conveniently open ; there is generally a reputed ghost or two—which, however much we laugh at in broad daylight, is apt to appeal more strongly to the imagination when we are lying awake, during the small hours, in an antiquated four-poster. Lastly, the “Castle,” or “Hall,” or “Tower,” or whatever imposing name it may bear, though generally what the auctioneers term “finely situate,” is by no means always placed in the most picturesque spot of those which its extensive lands afford for building purposes. In the good old times, when everybody was for interfering with his neighbour, or for avoiding being interfered with, the architect of the period was more intent upon preserving the personal safety of his employer, and making him inaccessible to the general public, than in providing him with an attractive out-look ; and we often sigh, as we contemplate some stately home, moat-ringed, as though wedded to old Time himself, “Oh, why was it not built there, or here ?” It is for these reasons that I prefer to be a guest—for in my wildest dreams I have never pictured myself as the proprietor thereof—at some modern mansion, though owned perchance by a City millionaire of yesterday, than to be entertained in what I have

heard a certain gilt but irreverent youth—himself the lord of such a feudal residence—term a “ghost box.” I can fancy few pleasures more solid and satisfactory than that of going about this fair land, with a hundred thousand pounds in one’s pocket or so, looking out for an estate with an eligible site to build a house upon after one’s own fancy—or perhaps still better, to purchase one ready built. George Campden—a fortunate man in many things—had been lucky enough to find in Riverside a ready-made residence that suited his taste exactly, save in some particulars which his riches easily enabled him to make conformable to it. It had been built but a few years, by one who had risen on the flood of Fortune only to be dragged down with its ebb; and yet it had no objectionable trace of newness. How could it do so, indeed, when the flinty bowels of old Bleabarrow had supplied its walls, up which the creepers had been as prompt to climb as heath and wild-flower were to deck the crags themselves?

There was an affinity between stone and plant at Riverside Hall which I have seen nowhere else, and which made the whole edifice less like a production of art than nature. Yet art—and that of the most modern kind—was everywhere visible about it, from the divan-like billiard-room with

its electric marking-board, to the gilt gas-lamps fringing the garden-path that led to where the steam-yacht was housed—a boat-house like a Chinese palace. The lamps were by no means superfluous, though the steam-yacht might certainly have been termed so, since it was only after much rain that the Nathay would admit of its reaching Bleabarrow Mere, under pretence of navigating the waters of which that ambitious vessel had been purchased; but the sailing-yacht, which the Chinese palace also contained, in addition to half-a-dozen pleasure-skiffs, was often put in requisition; and after a late picnic, or protracted voyage, the miniature lighthouse at the head of the boat-landing was useful enough, and the lamps beside the winding pathway saved many a bed of costly flowers from invasion and damage.

The house was built upon elevated ground, that gradually sloped up to it from the river; but at its back, and sheltering it from the north and east, a hill arose, so high that it could almost be termed a mountain, and yet so fertile that great trees grew almost to its summit, beneath which the insatiable sheep cropped the rich grass; while lower down clumps of tame deer wandered from shade to shade, with twinkling ears. The whole place, without and within, displayed that perfection and wholeness

which is only possible in a country residence when its possessor has large supplies of ready-money. It was Mr. Campden's boast that if anything went amiss, from the bursting of the kitchen-boiler to the breaking of a window-pane, that the mischief was repaired upon the instant.

"Ten squires, ten yeomen, mail-clad men," might not indeed wait "the beck of the warders ten;" nor "thirty steeds, both fleet and wight," stand "saddled in stable day and night," as the poet tells us "was the custom in Branksome Hall;" but there were steeds and serving-men in plenty at Riverside; and man and horse were despatched to the county town with equal speed, and certainly on much less emergencies than were wont to send them forth from that Border tower. No guest ever had it brought home to him that he was sojourning at a country house from the occurrence of an inconvenience that extended beyond the hour; while every luxury was supplied to him that London could produce. Even the lettuces in the salads were almost as good (though, if there was a weak point in the Riverside commissariat, it was that which is common to all country places whatsoever—the lettuces) as those bought in Covent Garden itself; while the asparagus was infinitely better. Not a bottle of champagne was ever

opened that had not been duly iced. The daily papers arrived by express at 4.30 from the nearest railway-station, and from it was a branch telegraph to the Hall, by which the morning news came down, and was found upon the breakfast-table by the earliest riser. The guests of the house descended to that meal at any time they pleased, or, if they preferred it, had it served to them in their own apartments; but the hours for lunch and dinner were absolutely fixed (as they must be if the cook is to respect his art), and were stated on a printed card, and hung up in every bedroom, as prices are at hotels. The wheel of existence was made, in short, to move so smoothly at Riverside, that you forgot the mechanism of strap and cog that are in general so plainly visible, and were apt to take that as a matter of course which was in reality the result of infinite pains and provision. When you shifted your quarters, it is true your mistake was immediately rectified; but it was said, and said truly, by those who had experience in such matters, that to be a guest with the Campdens "spoiled you" for visiting anywhere else.

What gave Riverside an advantage, however, it must be confessed, in such a comparison, was that it stood almost alone in being essentially a *summer* residence. Although the estate was large, there

was little game upon it, and that little—the proprietor being no sportsman—was not preserved. Hence, when the house was at its fullest, other country mansions were standing empty, their fashionable owners having gone on the Continent, or yachting in the Mediterranean; and when the hunter's horn, or the whirring wing of the pheasant, sounded their recall, Riverside in its turn became vacant of guests, and the Campdens came up to town for the winter months. Sometimes their daughter Mary would precede them by a few weeks, which she would spend with the Daltons in Cardigan Place; and sometimes she would tarry behind them, to enjoy “the season” a little longer, under the auspices of the same hostess.

The two families, though they called themselves cousins, were only distantly related, but they lived in great familiarity and friendship; Kate Dalton, in particular, felt almost as much at home at Riverside as beneath her father's roof, and especially on the present occasion, when her “belongings,” as she called them, were her fellow-guests. She had often stayed there alone, just as Mary Campden—her dearest friend, though she was her senior by two years—had stayed at Cardigan Place; but the fact was, she was never quite happy when away from her family. Her mother, whom she

adored, was herself in delicate health, while her sister Jenny was a confirmed invalid, afflicted with a sort of chronic neuralgia, which at times made any movement of the limbs intolerable; and Kate was eager to do her share of tendance, and also to take Tony off their hands during his holidays, whose animal spirits—though he, too, was far from physically strong—were at times not a little “trying.” It was from their mother that the children, doubtless, all inherited their delicacy of constitution, for Mr. Dalton was never known to have had “anything the matter with him,” in wind or limb; but for a certain nervous and impulsive temperament, which was common to them all, they had to thank, or to blame, their father.

Under an appearance of the most perfect *sang-froid*, it was asserted by those who ought to have known him best, that John Dalton concealed a sensitive and passionate nature, and that though he was the most popular man of his day in clubs and on business committees—two very different characters rolled into one—he could show “a deuce of a temper” when displeased. As his wife and children evidently loved him to excess, however, it is charitably to be believed that these paroxysms, if he really did indulge in them, were rare and short-lived. He has not yet arrived upon the

scene in person, but we may make some guess at his character from a specimen of his correspondence, perhaps.

The morning letters, despatched in a private bag by express from Bleabarrow, arrived early at the Hall, and having been taken out of their repository by Mr. Marks, the butler, were carried up to their respective owners.

"There is a letter from master, ma'am," observed Mrs. Dalton's maid, as she entered her apartment, and laid the missive in question on the dressing-table, at which that lady was already seated.

It was, perhaps, impertinent in Lucy to say as much, but she has been many years in her mistress's service, and is well acquainted with all her ways, and even with some of her thoughts. She concludes, for example, that she has risen so early this morning from her anxiety to hear news of her absent husband; and she is quite right in her surmise. Mrs. Dalton takes the letter quickly, and without any fashionable pretence of not being in a hurry to possess herself of the contents, yet opens it with a certain neatness of touch, of which characteristic no haste can deprive her. Nay, she even takes the opportunity of Lucy turning her back to set down the hot-water can, to press the

handwriting to her lips before reading it, like one saying grace before good food.

“BAMPTON, *August 1,*

began the note, which was, indeed, but a hurried scrawl—

“MY DEAREST LOVE,—You will see me to-morrow without fail; I hope by the train that gets to Bleabarrow at 6.30. Holt was over-sanguine, it seems; and they tell me if I get in here at all, it will be a tight squeeze. The people are a roughish lot.” (Here the delicate pink fades from the wife’s cheek, as when you suddenly remove the light with which you are showing off your cup of egg-shell china: “Good heavens, there is danger then!” she thinks.) “I have been soliciting their sweet voices for five hours to-day, at one place or another, and am dead-sick of it, and as hoarse as a raven. The whole affair is what Julia would call ‘quite too awful.’ I do not myself think I shall succeed, and, unhappily, it is of great importance that I should do so. Do not say anything to Holt of this, however. Kiss my dear ones for me, and tell Jenny I found a fern for her, while I was out canvassing, which seems to me to be rare; but I daresay it will be at once

detected by her learned eye to be something *communis*.

"I shall see you to-morrow, sweetheart, whether I shall have to be congratulated or consoled; that is something; but 'would it were supper-time and all were well.'

"Ever yours,

"JOHN DALTON."

"P.S.—Don't say a word to Holt, or anybody, of my misgivings."

Mrs. Dalton read this letter again and again there were things in it that puzzled her (such as the reference to supper-time. "I hope he is not hurting himself by taking suppers, which never agree with him," was her mental commentary upon that passage); but she knew those were not of importance: what gave *her* most uneasiness were the allusions to Mr. Holt, whose name was mentioned no less than three times.

Mr. Holt was a stockbroker, as Kate had told her friend; but even if she could have answered her general inquiry as to what a stockbroker was, which is doubtful, she could certainly not have explained the nature of the calling of Mr. Holt in particular. Few persons, indeed, could have done so. His doings were by no means confined

to scrip and share ; he had a finger in every pie from which "plums" are picked ; and wherever there were wires, it was his aim to pull one. His influence over her husband, Mrs. Dalton was well aware was great, though she did not know how it was obtained. It seemed to her very strange, and almost humiliating, that her John, who was so clever and brilliant, should allow himself to be persuaded into this and that by such a blunt, plain man as Richard Holt, one rather younger than older than himself (though he did not look younger), and who had nothing to recommend him beyond a character for shrewdness. She would have been indignant with anyone to whose opinion her husband had deferred ; but the influence of this man was peculiarly obnoxious to her, since it had drawn him into business and politics, which she detested, because they took him so much from her and home. She had hitherto seen no other evil in them, and certainly no danger ; but a phrase in her husband's letter, or rather a word in the phrase, had now excited her apprehensions. "I do not myself think I shall succeed" (that is, in being elected for Bampton) ; "and, unhappily, it is of great importance I should do so." Of course it was important that John should get into Parliament,

but why should he have written "*unhappily*, it is of great importance?" He was wont to write rapidly—to dash off his words, indeed, as fast as his pen could form them; but he rarely used an unfitting word, or a superfluous one. She had not thought so much of John's becoming a senator as most wives equally devoted to their husbands would have done, but that was because she had so high an opinion of his talents, reputation, and social position, that no adventitious distinction could, in her eyes, make him a greater man. It was simple in her to think so much of him, but it was singularly becoming. It had been once said by a very great reader of mankind—one who had studied "each mode of the lyre" of human life, and had "mastered them all," that Mrs. John Dalton was "the nicest woman in England;" and though that had been said at a time when she was one of the prettiest, her niceness had not departed with the years. It might almost have been said that her prettiness had remained with her also—as one sees her standing now, with that letter in her hand, but gazing thoughtfully through the open window; only "prettiness" could not have expressed that matured grace. Her once golden hair no longer ripples in bright waves, and is streaked here and there with silver; her slight form has lost its

comely outlines, and her whole appearance denotes fragility; but the love-light in her eyes shines out as clearly as in her bridal days, and burns with that sacred flame which years of constancy and trial alone can give it, and which no loss nor cross can ever extinguish; a saint as holy and as pure as any virgin of the cloister; a guardian angel set in the niche of Home.

She had not thought much, I say, of how things might go at Bampton; but now that she heard that they might go *unhappily*, her feelings changed, and the matter assumed that "great importance," though she knew not on what account, that it wore in her husband's eyes. Everyone said, and justly, how kind and unselfish Mrs. Dalton was; how tender to misfortune; how gentle as well as liberal to the poor; how ready and eager to heal family differences. She had been appealed to, more than once, to intercede for a spendthrift son, and once even for a runaway daughter; and not in vain; and yet she only lived for her husband and her children. Her heart was open to all the world—it was difficult to close it against even the wicked; but in her heart of hearts were the images of those four beloved ones set up alone as idols. "God and my country" was not her motto, though, perhaps, she would have gone as far to

serve her country as the foremost of our female politicians ; but simply " God and my dear ones ; " for them, however, she would have laid down her life without a sigh.

To no purpose she ransacks her mind for any sign that might point to the cause of John's anxiety about this election ; it would cost him some considerable sum of money, she was aware, but she also knew that he had calculated the cost, and had the money to spare. It was not usual with him to confide his business affairs to her ; but he had told her so much as that in answer to her gentle expostulations against his embracing political life at all. The " unhappiness " could therefore have nothing to do with money matters ; and yet it had certainly to do with Mr. Holt, whose connection with her husband was based solely upon them. They had nothing else in common, she was quite sure. She had her doubts whether they were even quite good friends, though they were thought to be so by everybody. Indeed, she was aware that Mr. Campden had asked Mr. Holt down to Riverside entirely upon her husband's account, and, as she suspected, even at his express request. "*Do not say anything to Holt, however,*" read she again. But why *should* she say anything ? Why should John suppose that she should have spoken

to the man about such private affairs at all? He was a person, as her husband well knew, for whom she had no liking, and whom she kept at as great a distance as politeness permitted; so that the injunction was quite superfluous; and yet it was repeated in his postscript. "Don't say a word to Holt, or anybody, of my misgivings." She would not, of course, say a word to anybody, since he had forbidden it; but without that warning, she would certainly not have dreamed of saying one word of John's affairs to Mr. Holt.

Mrs. Dalton has done with her letter at last, and every line of it having been committed to memory, places it in her bosom; then calling up a smile upon her face, she opens a green baize door, and knocks at another door behind it.

"Come in, dear mamma," answers a cheerful voice; and she enters the neat room accordingly. This is a luxuriously furnished apartment, hung with pictures, lined with books, and evidently not intended as a sleeping-room; yet there is a charming little bed in it, with rose-coloured curtains hanging upon it like a tent, and also an article of furniture that looks like a second bed, though it is only a reclining couch of peculiar construction. Upon this latter a young girl of about seventeen is lying, propped up with cushions, at the

window, and apparently sketching the prospect it affords.

“What! up and at work already, Jenny? Surely that is not prudent, my darling?” There is a look of pain but not of reproof upon the mother’s face as she stoops down to kiss her child; and it is reflected in that of her daughter. But the pain of the former is mental, and that of the latter is physical.

“I felt rather uneasy in bed, mamma, so exchanged it for the couch; and when Lucy came she moved it to the window.”

“But, my poor child, what did you do with yourself till she called you? Why did you not pull the string for me?” She pointed to a little cord that passed under the two doors, and formed a communication between her daughter’s bed and her own.

“Oh, it was too early to wake you, mamma; and yet it was broad daylight, so that I could do my lace-work. There was a letter from papa, Lucy said.”

“Yes, dear. He will be here to-day, he hopes in time for dinner; he wrote but a short note, yet sent an especial message to yourself. He is bringing back a little present for you;” and she gave Jenny the message about the fern.

"How good of him it was," said the invalid, flushing up, "to think of me when he was canvassing! Was it not, mamma?"

"I believe your papa thinks of you at all times, Jenny. I hope you will have a good report to give of yourself to him, in spite of this bad night."

"Oh, the night was not bad, mamma; only a little long; and as for me, Dr. Curzon says I am pounds better than I was when I last came to Riverside. He told me last night at the charades, that he hoped to see me act a milk-maid carrying pails next year, as naturally as Kitty did the housemaid with her broom. How charming she looked! did she not? And so did Polly, for that matter; only I thought that Polly was a trifle too natural—looked the character to too great perfection."

"Most girls in cotton prints and flyaway caps with red ribbons, would look the part that they were playing, my dear," said Mrs. Dalton, quickly.

"Yes, but our Kitty did not. It was easy enough, as Mr. Holt whispered to me, to see who was the princess in disguise. That was a pretty little compliment, no doubt, and had truth besides to recommend it. But do you know, mamma"—here Jenny began to sketch most vigorously—"I don't much like that Mr. Holt."

“Why not, my dear? He seems a very inoffensive person.”

“Yes, he does not bite one, certainly; indeed, the creature makes up to *us* as though he had very good intentions indeed.”

“The creature, my dear!”

“Well, I should have said the man, I suppose. But even you, mamma, whose good word is worth so little, as Mrs. Campden says, because everybody has it, even you could not call Mr. Holt a ‘gentleman.’ If you except his hat and his boots—which I own are very brilliant—he can scarcely be said to ‘shine in society.’”

“As to shining, everybody is not expected to do that, my dear Jenny. But since your papa thinks him good enough to keep company with *him*, Mr. Holt is good enough, I suppose, for most societies,” answered Mrs. Dalton, drily.

“Well, papa can make friends with everybody, mamma. He is equally at home with a bishop and a bargee.”

“My dear Jenny——”

“Nay, mother; I was only referring to the versatility of papa’s genius. Now, we are not all of us so talented in that respect; and I, for my part, do not feel at ease in Mr. Richard Holt’s company. It is ungrateful of me, I know, be-

cause he evidently intends to be extraordinarily civil."

"It is not only ungrateful, but unjust, Jenny; it is plain to me that you are entertaining an unfounded prejudice against this person."

"A prejudice, certainly; but whether unfounded or not remains to be proved. Lookers-on, dear mamma, it is said, see most of the game; and at the game of life, I, on my couch here, am fated to be but a looker-on. I am carried downstairs, and set down among the rest; but no one takes notice of me—of course, I don't mean *you*, dear," added she quickly, in answer to her mother's glance of tender reproof; "nor any one that is dear to you; but I am referring to strangers generally. Then I amuse myself with making my little observations—'the *child* amongst us takin' notes,' as papa calls me."

"Your papa spoils you, Jenny, and makes you think too much of yourself, I fear. How is it possible that a girl of your years, and with so small an experience of life——"

"Less than even that of most girls," put in Jenny, quietly, "by reason of my infirmity; I acknowledge all that."

"Well, then, how is it possible, my dear, that you can judge rightly of grown-up people?"

"It is instinct, I suppose, or intuition ; but papa says I have got it."

Jenny has at all events some sagacity, thus to invoke her father's authority in corroboration of her pretensions. Mrs. Dalton suddenly dropped her tone of reproof, and answered, laughingly : "My dear Jenny, you are a shocking egotist ; and it is useless to reason with such self-conceit. But since you have already passed this infallible judgment of yours upon poor Mr. Holt, may I ask you what it is ? "

"But, mamma, you won't be angry ? "

"Angry, no ; except with myself, perhaps, for putting such a foolish question to a child like you."

"Well, it is my opinion that Mr. Holt is a H—U—M—B—U—G."

"But why, Jenny ? "

"Nay, I cannot say why. An oracle gives its answer, but never its reasons ; indeed, I could not give mine if I tried. I have seen a hundred things in the man—of course, but little things—yet all pointing the same way. Mr. Holt is acting a part, as much as Kitty was acting one last night ; he has something in view, from which he would divert the attention of others. But there"—and Jenny laughed a merry laugh, which had a certain

goblin ring about it too—"I will say no more, except that he is a humbug."

"Considering that Mr. Holt is especially esteemed in the City for his shrewd and straightforward character, Jenny," replied Mrs. Dalton, gravely, "I think you have said quite enough to upset your pretensions as a seer."

"That is suspicious, though," said Jenny, slyly.

"What is?"

"Why, his being so 'esteemed for, &c.' How could he be all that, and in the City too, unless he was a humbug?"

"I don't understand you, Jenny. You might just as well say that because your dear papa is so admired and beloved by almost everybody, that *he* is a—that very vulgar word you used just now."

"Oh, papa is like nobody else in the world, and is not to be judged by ordinary rules," replied Jenny, naïvely. "It is his mission to make things pleasant, whereas it is not Mr. Holt's mission by any means, and his endeavours to do so are most ridiculous. His attempts at a joke are like the gamboling of that horse on his back yonder, all hoof and teeth in the field; they are only laughable because they are so clumsy."

"But everybody can't be lively and agreeable, like your papa."

“Then don’t let them try,” answered Jenny, with irritation; “and, above all things, don’t let them try to be insinuating, and soft and tender, when they are obviously rhinoceroses and hippopotamuses, and cannot do it without blowing into one’s ear. Don’t let them——”

Here she was interrupted by a soft drumming noise at the door, which gradually rose and swelled in volume, till it became an excellent imitation of a gong.

“Come in,” said Jenny, laughing; “come in, you naughty boy.”

Then the door opened, and disclosed a youth of about nine years old, with a thin but merry face, set in a thicket of brown curls, and above the curls a parcel of school-books, which he held there by one hand, as a maiden holds her pitcher at the well.

He closed the door softly, then took a noiseless run and slide upon the carpet that landed him at the foot of the couch. “And how is my pretty mamma?” inquired he as he kissed her cheek, “And how is my venerable coach?” added he, addressing Jenny.

“Well, the coach is a little out of repair, Tony, this morning,” answered the young girl; “and I doubt whether it will be able to carry all those

passengers: 'Cornelius Nepos,' 'Virgil,' 'Cæsar,' and the wicked 'Colenso'——"

"There was an old Bishop of Natal
Who had a Zulu for a pal,"

quoted the boy gaily.

"Said the Zulu, 'Look here'——"

"Be quiet, Tony; I won't have you say such things," said Jenny, sharply. "It is all very well for grown-up people, but not for children."

"But Jeff is not grown up—at least so everybody says, except himself—and he sings:

"There was an old Bishop of Natal
Whose views upon Moses were fatal."

"Hush!" said Jenny, holding her finger up rebukefully, and pointing to Mrs. Dalton, who was looking out of the window, apparently absorbed in thought.

Pupil and teacher were very like to one another; the former had all the hues of health, but they were delicate hues, and the expression of his thin features was feminine, though intelligent in a high degree. His eyes, too, though large and lustrous, were very soft, and as his curling hair mingled with his sister's caressingly, the two might almost have been taken for sisters.

“What is troubling dear mamma?” whispered he gently.

“Hush! Nothing. But *you* will trouble her if you sing songs like that. Why have you brought all those books with you this morning, instead of your lesson?”

“Well, I want to get all my lessons over at once. I got up this morning on purpose to learn them; for there are to be sports at Bleabarrow to-day, Jeff says—wrestling, and leaping, and all sorts—and Jeff is going to take me.”

“Geoffrey would make you as idle as himself, if that were possible,” said Jenny, her wan fingers playing with her brother’s hair; “but I don’t fancy you will be trusted to go with him to any such place. What do you think, mamma, of Tony’s going to Bleabarrow Feast under the wing of Master Geoffrey?”

“Indeed, my child, I don’t think that will quite do,” said his mother, thus appealed to. “Mrs. Campden has, I know, a bad opinion of such gatherings, and Jeff is but a boy. I am afraid you must give them up, Tony, unless the sports can wait till after papa comes home. I have got a letter which says we may expect him to-night. Is not that good news?”

“Yes, of course,” said Tony, hanging his head

down a little. "But couldn't Mrs. Campden send Robert with me?"

"No, darling; a servant would, under the circumstances, be worse than nobody. A child should have some grown-up person, who is a gentleman, with him, when he goes to such places."

"Then I've got leave to go," cried Tony, exultingly; "for a grown-up gentleman has promised to go with me, though I would rather have gone with Jeff and Robert, if I could."

"You don't mean to say you have inveigled good Mr. Campden?" cried Mrs. Dalton, not, perhaps, displeased at this proof of her little son's powers of persuasion.

"It's not Mr. Campden, mamma—it's Mr. Holt. He heard Jeff say that he doubted whether Mrs. Campden would like me to go with him, and offered to take me himself."

Mother and daughter exchanged a rapid glance of astonishment, and Jenny broke into one of her musical but mocking laughs.

"Mr. Holt in charge of a small boy at Bleabarrow Feast!" cried she. "That will be a more amusing spectacle than any the sports will have to offer."

"I think it was very good-natured of Mr. Holt," observed Mrs. Dalton gravely, "and very unselfish;

for, as you say, it is quite out of his line, and he has nothing to gain by it."

"I don't remember that I said *that*, mamma," observed Jenny, drily. "Well, if you are going to these sports, Anthony, we must get on with our lessons." And pupil and teacher commenced their usual task accordingly.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE ROSE-GARDEN.

ALL rooms at Riverside Hall are good rooms, including those of the servants, which, instead of being ill-lit, ill-warmed, with sloping roofs and mere apologies for windows—such as are common in all those ancient mansions which we see pictured in “Gentlemen’s Seats” or “The Ancestral Homes of England”—are comfortable, and of fair size; but even at Riverside there are distinctions. The guest-rooms appropriated for bachelors, for example, though well and even luxuriously furnished, do not look out towards the front of the house.

The penalty inflicted upon unmarried persons beneath that hospitable roof is to have their view restricted to the croquet-ground, the rosary, and the hill-park (as it was called) at the back of the house. The stables are hidden away in a hollow, and approached by a secret way known only to

the household, for it is not Mr. Campden's habit, as it is that of many country gentlemen, to lead his male friends thither after breakfast to discuss hocks and pasterns, and to inhale the fine flavour of the saddle-room, and worse. But even this back view is not to be despised by those, such as Mr. Richard Holt, who have been shut up in Abdell Court, in the City of London, for eight hours a day through spring and summer, and doubtless that gentleman would have been enjoying it this morning, had he not had something more important to engage his attention. A goodly batch of letters had, as usual, arrived for him by the morning's post, and in their contents, though he is up and dressed, and sitting at the open window, he is rapt for the present, to the exclusion of external objects. He is one of those men—if you will take the opportunity of observing him—for whom the letter-bag has always paramount importance; men who do not mix readily with those about them, or find pleasure or even engrossing employment in the present; whose thoughts are semi-occupied, whose very gaze is filmed over, as it were, with the web of their projects. They are never sure of their movements, or of the length of their sojourn in any place; all must depend, they say, “upon the afternoon post,” as though they were in a constant

crisis of affairs, which a line of somebody's handwriting must settle for them one way or another: an unhappy class of people enough, but whose anxieties, let us hope, are not quite so overwhelming as they would have us believe.

It would be unjust, however, to accuse Mr. Richard Holt of affectation; he is much too sagacious to be affected, and often finds circumstances much too serious to need any exaggeration of their importance. Indeed, it is just now his constant endeavour to avoid that appearance of pre-occupation peculiar to weaker brethren of his kind, and to play the part of a frank and easy-going man of the world—that is, of the thoughtless, high-placed, and luxurious world in which he finds himself, to confess the truth, for the first time. It must not, however, be supposed that our new acquaintance is a vulgar fellow. His appearance is good; he is six feet high, and well-built; his large features, if somewhat grave and still, are capable of considerable expression, and if he looks old for his age—which is five-and-forty—he has looked about the same age for the last ten years, and will probably look no older for ten years to come. His eyes are hard, and he knows it; if he could make them otherwise, he would very gladly do so; he can smile and speak softly, and his tongue has no

lack of persuasion upon certain topics ; but when his talk ranges beyond business affairs, he cannot get his eyes to accompany his voice, and the result is a want of harmony. People talk about the intense significance of the jaw and chin, and, very possibly (for there is no limit to such folly), of the lobes of the ears ; but Mr. Holt, who was no fool, and never attempted to deceive himself (whatever his conduct might be as respected others), knew that his eyes were not what they should be, and that it was a great misfortune to him. They were not ugly, by any means : not those hard-boiled ones, the balls of which project like the yolk of a stale poached egg ; but long years of calculation and plodding, and standing upon his guard against rogue and scoundrel had, as it were, *set* them, and they could never melt again either with love or pity, however nearly his heart might be touched by either. However, he still finds them exceedingly useful ; one glance suffices to put him in possession of the contents of most of the letters that have arrived for him this morning, after bestowing which, he either tears the communication in small fragments, or places it in a huge pocket-book of Russian leather, which he always carries in his left breast-pocket, giving him the lopsided appearance of an amazon. Two notes, however, afford

some cause for deliberation, and he gives each a second attentive perusal; one is from his confidential clerk in Abdell Court.

“Mem.—Brooks has cabled as follows: ‘Sell Laras: WHOLE CONCERN A PLANT.’” On another slip of paper was written: *“Dear Sir, on the whole advisable not to telegraph to you, especially as the exchange had closed when the news arrived.”*

“Brand has got a head on his shoulders,” mused Mr. Holt with a grim smile as he read those words; “almost too good a head for my service. On the first opportunity I shall let him run loose.”

“Astor left yesterday, but with no immediate intention, I have reason to believe, of quitting England. I hope you find the country air is doing you benefit.—Yours truly, ROBERT BRAND.”

“Well, that is a good riddance every way, though I should have felt happier had the scoundrel put the seas between him and a certain person; the last man in the world, however, as it happens, he is likely to foregather with. Master Philip knew too much.”

With a thoughtful brow, Mr. Holt takes up the second letter that he had reserved from the batch,

and for the second time examined the postmark, *Bampton*.

“This comes just in the nick of time, for the news it brings will shape my views about the mine. I shall have the whole day to think about how to play my fish. It was uncommon sharp of Brand to recollect that they had a private wire here, which makes all communications public.”

“‘*I thought it, on the whole, advisable not to telegraph.*’ Confound his sagacity! I will certainly get rid of him on the first opportunity, and select a less intelligent lieutenant. If *he* does not know too much, this shows he has suspicions, and I don’t like suspicious people about me. ‘*Bampton, Headquarters.—Our canvass is now over. The contest will be a narrow one. Mr. Griggs will be the man.*’”

That was all the second note contained, but it seemed to affect its recipient even more gravely than their first. “Things are coming, then, to a crisis,” muttered he, “and earlier than I expected.” He sat, plunged in thought, for a full minute; then, “The man has nobody to thank but himself for what will happen,” exclaimed he, in a firm voice.

If “the man”—whoever he was—had been standing before him in the flesh, and accusing him of having been the cause of his misfortunes, his

denial could not have been more earnest and explicit. As he spoke, a clear and ringing voice made the air musical without :

Birds in our wood sang, ringing through the valleys :
Maud is here, here, here—in among the lilies.

He started up excitedly, his ordinary pale cheek flaming crimson, as a man flushes when another has given him the lie ; but as the song went on, a curious change came over him. The lines of thought and care seemed to grow faint upon his brow, and the whole expression of his face to soften ; his lips parted with a smile, and he lifted up his hand for silence, as though he had not been alone :

I kissed her slender hand ; she took the kiss sedately ;
Maud is not seventeen, but she is tall and stately.

Holt smiled softly towards the window, and, keeping himself concealed behind the curtain, peered cautiously through its folds.

In the rose-garden, as it was called, from the flowers to which the little plot of ground was exclusively devoted, and immediately beneath the window, stood Kate Dalton, in the act of plucking a bud which she had just selected from a bunch that grew above her head. Her face was full in view ; the morning sun shone on her bright

tresses, and transmuted them to gold; its beams darted at her eyes so lovingly that she was forced to almost close them, so that their long silken lashes were made plainly visible; the position of the rosebud necessitated her standing for an instant on her toes, and exemplified that particular grace of which the employment of high-heeled shoes is supposed (very erroneously) to supply an imitation; the extended arms lent a fullness to the otherwise too slender bust; the shapely head seemed to be crowned with nodding roses. It was indeed "a picture to make an old man young;" and upon Richard Holt, who was by no means old, according to his own reckoning, it had a very singular effect—it made him giddy. His head went round with him; his heart sank, down, down, with a feeling of sickness; and for the moment he clung to the curtain to steady himself, if not to preserve him from a fall. The next moment he had stepped quickly across the room to his dressing-case—not the solid and elaborate affair that such articles generally were at Riverside, but a mere roll of leather containing various articles of the toilet—and taken from it a pair of scissors. Slipping these into his pocket, he left his room, and descended the stairs with hurrying steps. The breakfast-parlour, though empty, save for an attendant, had

all things prepared for the morning meal ; but he passed by the door, and out into the hall. He paused for an instant at the hat-stand, doubtful whether he should select the "chimney-pot," which he usually wore, and which he knew suited him best, or the "wideawake," which he had brought down in compliance with the fashions of the country.

Unluckily for his personal appearance, he chose the latter, which had the effect of a clumsy disguise. It took away from him his City air, it is true, but substituted for it that of some confidential servant who has the immediate reversion of his master's clothes. Aristocracy has not yet issued a stamp by which even the most distinguished member of it can be recognised in a bad hat ; nor is it every one who can "carry off" even a wide-awake. The newer it is, the worse it looks on some folks ; and the wideawake of Mr. Richard Holt, of Abdell Court, was very new. If the handle of the pair of scissors that were lying in his breast-pocket had been but visible, one would have set him down, I am afraid, as a master tailor.

It was not in the nature of things that Mr. Holt should run, but he moved rapidly across the gravel sweep, and through the shrubbery that led by devious ways to the rose-garden, and arrived there

just in time to see Kate Dalton—kissed. It is terrible to have to record it, but it is the truth—kissed by a young gentleman. There was no time for Mr. Holt to restrain his headlong speed, and to pretend not to see it. His position was precisely that of the spectator described in that famous ballad, of which all the verses save one have been lost in the mists of time :

I saw Esau kissing Kate,
And the fact is we all three saw,
For I saw Esau, he saw me,
And *she* saw I saw Esau.

Only in this case it was not Esau; for Esau, we have reason to know, was a hairy man, and the offender on the present occasion had a cheek as smooth as a girl's. Hair is not hair (and how true this of many a native-looking chignon) when it is down, and Jeff's lip had only down to boast of. This may not seem of much consequence to the reader, but to Richard Holt it was a great mitigation of the shock which he experienced. The attachment of a boy and girl is never more ridiculous and immaterial than in the eyes of a middle-aged man who himself has only just begun to feel Love's dart. Moreover, Master Geoffrey Derwent's lips had only saluted Kate's fingers, and there is really nothing in *that*; for

does not the Queen herself permit the same liberty to mayors and consuls? Nay, even for this transgression there had been a very sufficient cause, had Mr. Holt but known it. He had last set eyes on Kate, you remember, when she was reaching for the rosebud, and trilling that exquisite little verse :

I kissed her slender hand ; she took the kiss sedately ;
Maud is not seventeen, but she is tall and stately.

At that instant, if Mr. Holt had not been in such a hurry to bring the scissors, he might have heard a merry voice chime in with :

“Maud is tall and stately, but not tall enough to reach that bud without assistance ;” and then a longer arm than hers interposed, and drew down the flower. When he had done that—not in a hurry, you know, but with a quiet deliberation and ever so much solicitude to remove the thorns from the stalk—it was only in accordance with the eternal fitness of things that he should “kiss her slender hand ;” and it is my firm conviction that she would have taken it “sedately” enough, but for Mr. Richard Holt’s unexpected intervention. As it was, though her face flushed like any rose around her, she merely observed : “How rude you are, Jeff ;” then turned to the new-comer with a cold “Good-morning, Mr. Holt.”

If she had been seventy instead of seventeen (she was in fact eighteen), she could hardly have carried off that little incident with greater *sang-froid*, or more perfect self-command.

Master Jeff, on the other hand, a tall and comely lad, with light hair, but bright black eyes, glared haughtily at the intruder, as though the rose-garden had been his own private preserve, which the other had violated; while Mr. Holt stood dumfounded, and slowly produced his scissors.

"I saw you from my window yonder, Miss Dalton"—he looked up towards it, as though for corroboration of his story, but her eye did not follow his; she looked as though, if there was one thing on earth absolutely indifferent to her, and without one scintilla of interest, it was the situation of Mr. Holt's apartment; "and remarking that you had a difficulty with your friends—or may I say relatives? for there is a strong family likeness—the roses, I brought you this pair of scissors."

"Thanks," said Kate, not taking them from his hand; "but I have gathered all I want."

She had but two buds, one of which she carried in her left hand, and the stalk of the other she was now tying to a leaf or two with a piece of silk, obviously getting it ready for somebody's button-hole.

That new word "Thanks," so common in young ladies' mouths nowadays, seems, somehow, to lack the warmth and grace of their old "Thank you," and to Mr. Holt's ears it now sounded particularly cold.

He stood snipping the scissors, for want of something to say or do, and gazing longingly at the little bud, which she had by this time transformed into a fairy bouquet. Kate's heart, which had been hardened by his *mal-à-propos* appearance, began to feel some pity for this man, to whom she had certainly been somewhat discourteous.

"Mamma tells me that you have been kind enough to sacrifice yourself for Tony's sake, Mr. Holt, so far as to accompany him to the sports at Bleabarrow. Jenny was 'spurting' him, as he calls it, through his 'Cæsar' this morning, in order that he might go off to them early."

"It is no sacrifice, I am sure—that is, if I can ever be of any use to you or yours, it never seems so."

"I don't see why Mr. Holt should trouble himself," said Geoffrey, "since I promised Tony to take him long ago."

"Yes; but then, you see, you are but a boy, like himself, Jeff," observed Kate: "it would be like the blind leading the blind, to trust you with Tony among all those queer rough people."

"I don't think them at all queer," returned the lad, brusquely; "they are honest and hearty folks, who never do harm to anybody, except now and then to themselves, through taking too much beer."

"But *then* they don't know *what* they do," remarked Mr. Holt mildly, delighted to find Kate and himself conducting this little argument in concert.

"Just so," said Kate. "Now, don't be cross, Jeff, merely because you have not arrived at years of discretion, which is a question of time, you know, though to some people of a very long time."

At this Mr. Holt laughed approvingly, though Kate had shown no such appreciation of his allusion to her likeness to the roses, which he had thought particularly happy and opportune.

Jeff took no more notice of his laugh, nor of his remark, than if he had not been present.

"Of course, I knew that Mrs. Campden would object to my going with Tony—she always does object to my doing anything—but I should have thought your mother would have trusted me, Kate."

"Certainly, my dear Jeff, mamma would trust you; she always says you are the best of boys. There now, you are taking huff again: and here's

a rosebud for your jacket—I mean your coat.” And with that she placed the little nosegay in his button-hole, while the young fellow thanked her with his eyes.

“That should make amends to Mr. Derwent for anything,” said Mr. Holt, significantly, as the three moved slowly towards the house. “I am sure I would submit to be distrusted——”

“Or even to be called too young,” interrupted Jeff, stung into unaccustomed epigram.

“Certainly, I would submit to that indignity,” continued Mr. Holt, good-naturedly—though his unhappy eyes would not look good-natured, in spite of all his efforts—“and indeed to any other, for such a guerdon. You have still another flower, I see, Miss Dalton, and remember, I *did* bring you the scissors, though I was too late.”

“You are too late again, Mr. Holt,” answered Kate gently, as they ascended the steps at the front-door; “I have only this rosebud left, and I always give one, as you know, to Uncle George.”

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. CAMPDEN ORDERS THE PONY-CARRIAGE.

MR. CAMPDEN was not Kate's uncle, being only, even by marriage, a distant cousin; but the relations between him and the Daltons were so cordial, that the junior members of the latter family always called him by that title—which I am not quite sure that his wife relished, since she who was the blood-relative was never entitled aunt. He was a bluff, kindly man of some fifty years of age, and though he had always been engaged in commerce—till fortune had filled both his pockets and enabled him to retire on his gains—his appearance was that of a thorough country gentleman. That he possessed some astuteness, his great success attested; while that he had some ideas beyond mere money-making was certain, from his choice of Riverside as a residence; but these mental gifts would never have been guessed at by ordinary observers; indeed, Machiavelli himself would have been

puzzled to make much of Uncle George, since he rarely opened his lips save to admit his meals or the end of a cigar. His existence had been, in fact, absorbed by the superior vitality of his wife. It had not, indeed, been always so ; there were some who professed to have seen him make some show of resistance to her indomitable will ; but though her seizure of the poor gentleman had been very gradual—inch by inch, as a cobra swallows a rabbit—he had never recovered any portion of himself that had once been appropriated, and the process of deglutition had long ago been completed. Mr. Campden still drew his breath independently of his wife, and that was all : he never attempted to shape it, without her leave and license, into a word of command, or even the expression of a wish ; at times, when elated, he would break out into a confession of his own state of thralldom—as a helot in his cups might have done—in which there was a touch of humour, bearing witness that he had some individuality still left in him ; but these little jets of independence grew every day more rare, and it was plain that their source was drying up. If he had been a septuagenarian married to a young girl of twenty, his thralldom could not have been more complete than it had become of late, and an old friend had on one occasion taken the liberty to

tell him so. "I know it, my dear fellow," he had replied, without a trace of irritation at this plain speaking; "and, unhappily, Julia is more than twenty."

Indeed, there was no reason—absolutely none—to a looker-on, why Mrs. Campden should have got her husband so entirely under her thumb. She had not been very young when he married her, not very pretty, nor particularly accomplished; and whatever might have been her attractions in these respects, they had certainly not improved with years; yet every year she had placed him in closer bondage, till he could now scarce move hand or foot. He had still, however, a smile for everybody, and it was universally understood that he would do a good turn for anyone, unless his wife had issued a special ukase to the contrary. He was amazingly popular with all young people, and, indeed, with old ones also, although the more thoughtful of his friends regarded his state of servitude with just contempt. "When a man is downright henpecked," said John Dalton, "it almost always arises from his having committed peccadillos which have come to his wife's ears; but poor Campden has no such 'set-off' to comfort him; he has fallen a victim to his Julia through sheer indolence." And this was the true state of the

case. Moreover, it cannot be denied that Mrs. Campden possessed that gift in reality which is always imputed to those members of our governing classes who have nothing perceptible to recommend them—administrative capacity. She was essentially a managing woman, and would have swallowed everybody else, inch by inch, if she had had the chance, just as she had swallowed her husband; her love of power had “stomach for them all;” and yet a more unambitious and “ordinary” looking little woman than Mrs. Campden it is not easy to imagine. Even now, as she sits at the head of her own breakfast-table, there is nothing of despotism in her look or manner; and only by the unusual quickness with which the servants execute her orders, and wait upon her rather to the exclusion of her guests, would you guess her to be the Tartar she really is. Her skin, however, though not particularly delicate, is of that unfortunate kind that betrays emotion, and her pale face will glow like a peony on very slight occasion; her voice, too, which is unusually thin and low, will, if opposed, become metallic. Curiously enough, this is the case, though in a less degree, with Miss Mary also; and when mother and daughter have their little wrangles—in which the latter is always discomfited—their argument

at a little distance resembles the dropping of copper coin—as if they were playing “odd and even” for halfpence.

This morning, however, Mrs. Campden is all smiles and harmony; she has just succeeded in persuading Mrs. Dalton, who sits on her right hand, to accompany her in her pony-carriage that afternoon, for a long drive; and her victory has flattered her, for she knows that Mrs. Dalton did not want to go, being anxious upon her husband’s account, who is sure to telegraph to her at the close of the poll.

“My dear,” observed her hostess, “that is just the reason I wanted to take you; the time will pass quickly, I hope, in paying our little visits; and once away from the house, you will cease to fidget about the news that may come from Bampton.”

“Well, as you please, my dear Julia; but I am afraid I shall prove but a dull companion,” sighs Mrs. Dalton, after some attempts at escape—as vain as those of a gold-fish in a glass bowl.

“I have never found you *that*, dear Edith,” answers the other, laughingly. “I wish, Mr. Holt, that you were as certain of having a pleasant afternoon, as I am with Mrs. Dalton. I fear you will find our Bleabarrow festivities very heavy.”

“Yes, indeed, I am sure it is most kind of Mr.

Holt to go with Tony," said Mrs. Dalton; "for though I have the utmost faith in Jeff"—here she slid her hand down to Geoffrey's knee, who sat beside her, and patted it, in sign of affectionate confidence—"his good-nature has made him too much of a playmate with my boy, to admit of his ever using due authority."

"Oh, *that* is not to be thought of for a moment," observed Mrs. Campden, austere.

"I don't think any harm is likely to happen to my young charge," smiled Mr. Holt; "unless he should insist upon competing among the light-weights."

"And why not, if there are boys?" inquired Tony earnestly.

"Oh, how shocking!" cried Mrs. Campden. "That would be a pretty thing for a young gentleman to do: to wrestle with all those vulgar creatures."

"It would be only excusable if he were standing for Bampton instead of his father," observed Mr. Holt; "then, indeed, it would go down very well, as a proof that, though a Whig, he had got no pride about him."

"By-the-bye, Mr. Holt, you have not chanced to hear anything this morning about the election, I suppose?" inquired Mrs. Dalton; not because she

thought it at all probable that he had done so, but in order to anticipate any question upon his part which it would be embarrassing to her to answer.

“Not a word,” answered Mr. Holt, touching at the same time—whether in proof of his veracity, or to convince himself of the safety of the manuscript—the breast-pocket which contained the memorandum from *Headquarters*. “But your husband is sure to telegraph directly the thing is certain.”

“Oh, I *know*,” said Mrs. Dalton; “and that is why I was rather wishing to stay at home this afternoon;” and she cast an appealing look towards the mistress of the house. Whatever that lady had once acquired, however, whether promise or concession, she never dreamed of giving up again, but used as a possession of her own, and a basis from which to start in search of further gains.

“You would not object if you and I were to lunch a little earlier than the rest, Edith, would you,” inquired she, “as we have a good many calls to make?”

“Certainly not,” said Mrs. Dalton: the earlier she started, as she fondly hoped, the earlier she would be permitted to return and receive dear John’s despatch. But she reckoned without her hostess.

“That’s right, my dear ; I knew you would not mind ; and that will just enable me to push on as far as the Park, and call on Lady Brodie, who is generally a little beyond my beat.”

CHAPTER V.

MR. CAMPDEN ORDERS THE BAROUCHE.

THUS, therefore, it came about that, at the usual luncheon-hour, four of the breakfast-party had gone their ways, and there were gathered around the great table only the host and the three young ladies—for Jenny generally made her appearance at the mid-day meal.

“Now, Uncle George,” said Kate, merrily, “I hope you are going to be very polite indeed to us girls, because, you see, we have no other cavalier.”

“Don’t say polite, Kitty,” cried Jenny; “don’t waste your opportunities like that; of course he’ll be polite; say *devoted*.”

“My dears, I *am* devoted,” said Uncle George; “very much so indeed. If I can do anything to please you, pray mention it.”

“He is a nice old papa, he really is,” remarked Miss Mary, like an auctioneer who is recommending some article to an audience who have doubts.

"He has done himself a mischief already, upon your account, young ladies, by eating luncheon out of courtesy; let me tell you *that*," observed he.

"O papa, how *can* you say so, when you know mamma always cries out if you have two helps of meat, as you did to-day; and you had bottled stout, too!"

"All for your sakes, my dears; I felt that what Curzon calls 'support' would be necessary if I had to amuse you young people. And now I am prepared for further sacrifices. Suppose I take a glass of sherry?"

It was very unusual to see Mr. Campden in such a lively mood; he was generally as dumb as any china figure, and almost as motionless; now he was more like something in gutta-percha from which a weight has been removed, and which assumes its natural shape with elasticity. It was only very seldom that his wife was away at meal-times.

"My dear papa, you will certainly go to sleep, and be of no use at all?"

"Not a bit of it; I am all for exertion. Now suppose you and Kitty row me about on the river and Jenny steers."

"Oh, Uncle George, we have got blisters on,

our hands already," said Kitty, "from rowing you about; you are really very lazy."

"Well, supposing you girls dress up in Eastern costume—you are fond of dressing up—and come and dance before me. Pretend to be nautch-girls (if that is the way you pronounce it); and Jenny shall clap my hands together—if I like it—for applause."

"It is a capital idea," cried Jenny. "Let us get out all Mrs. Campden's beautiful Indian shawls, and do the thing completely."

The three girls burst out laughing, partly at the audacity of this proposal, but principally at the very long face which it caused Mr. Campden to draw.

"I don't think that will quite do, my dears," said he. "Now, what do you say to billiards? Mary and Kate shall play, and Jenny shall mark; and I will show *how* you ought to have played when you make mistakes. That will give me a good deal to do, but I don't mind."

"You are very rude, Uncle George, instead of being polite, far less devoted," said Kitty.

"Well, my dear, I only threw out these ideas as mere suggestions. If you are for archery, I can pull the bow against anybody, though I can never, somehow, shoot off the arrow; and as for croquet,

there are doubtless more stupid games than croquet, though I confess I have never seen them."

"But Jenny can neither shoot nor play croquet, papa," observed Mary, softly.

"Oh, pray don't mind *me*," said Jenny, with a little flush. "I shall be very happy looking on."

"My dear Jenny, a thousand pardons," cried Mr. Campden vehemently, his ruddy face becoming quite purple. "It was the stout that made me so stupid. The only amends I can think of is to leave our occupation for the afternoon entirely in your hands. Let the rest of us be Miss Jenny's slaves, and do whatever she pleases. What do you say, girls?"

"That will be capital!" cried Kate and Mary simultaneously.

"Do you really mean it, Uncle George?" asked Jenny, gravely.

"Unquestionably, my dear. I feel already like Herod when he had made that imprudent promise to his step-daughter—but my word is passed."

"But there are so many deliciously naughty things that I should like to do, Uncle George," said Jenny, thoughtfully. "It has long been my desire to go out in the steam-yacht with a few friends who do not in the least understand the machinery, and to see what will come of it;

whether it would ever stop, or not, of itself; and what we would do beyond making it whistle."

"I am truly thankful to say," observed Mr. Campden, piously, "that there is not enough water in the river to float the steam-yacht."

"So am I," cried Kate and Mary, also gratefully. It was well known to both of them that Jenny was afraid of nothing, and that her love of danger and excitement was in inverse proportion to her feeble physical powers.

"Well, then—it is a great bathos, after my steam-yacht notion—but, next to that expedition, I should like us all to go to Bleabarrow to see the wrestling."

"Oh, how delightful!" cried Kate.

"Oh my goodness!" ejaculated Mary, "what *will* mamma say?"

Mr. Campden poured himself out another glass of sherry, and ran his hands through his thin thatch of gray hair. Beneath his breath he might have been heard to murmur "Gracious heavens!" but the expression of his face was pretty firm.

"You think you would enjoy that sort of thing, Jenny?—I mean these games?"

"I am *sure* I should—that is, looking on at them. I should not make much of wrestling myself. Jeff says it's a noble spectacle; and Jeff

will be there, you know, and dear Tony, and Mr. Holt. Fancy how surprised they will be to see us! They will scarcely believe their eyes. Come, Uncle George, you'll keep your word."

Mr. Campden swallowed the sherry and rang the bell, for the discussion had lasted long after luncheon was over, and the servants had retired to their own mid-day meal.

"Jeff took the dog-cart," observed he, "and my wife the pony-carriage."

"Then we had better take the brougham," suggested Mary.

"No, my dear; I think the barouche would be more comfortable for all of us; and, besides, it will afford a better view."

"Uncle George, you are thinking of what will be more comfortable for *me*," said Jenny, softly.

"Well, it would not do to forget you *twice* in one afternoon, my dear," was the pleasant response. "Now, go and get your things on, girls, that we may start at once; and then we can get back pretty early, you know—before your mamma comes home. John, let the barouche be at the door in twenty minutes."

He had not issued such a command without consultation with that barouche's mistress, far less in direct opposition to her, for twenty years.

“My dear Jenny, I am quite jealous of you,” cried Mary Campden, as the girls trooped upstairs together, to attire themselves for the anticipated treat. “I am sure no seductions of *mine* would ever have persuaded papa to do such a thing. Why, it quite ‘partakes of the nature of a lark,’ as Jeff calls it; does it not?”

“She must have ‘given him medicines,’ as Falstaff says, to make dear Uncle George so complaisant,” laughed Kitty; she was a young lady who liked Shakespeare better than the musical glasses, and had a very pretty ‘trick of iteration.’ “She has certainly given him medicines.”

“No, my dears,” said Jenny, decisively; “it was neither my charms nor my medicines — though some people do take it medicinally: we owe everything to that second glass of sherry.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUIDE RACE.

“SPORTS,” as the celebration of country games is often locally called, are for the most part, in Derbyshire, much the same as they have now become in other places—an excuse for half-a-dozen excursion trains to convey the “rough” element from the neighbouring towns, and pour it over the peaceful fields, like sewage, only by no means with the same beneficial results; but at Bleabarrow this was not the case.

The prizes offered for competition were too small, and the place itself too remote, to attract much public attention, so that the proceedings were of a “truly rural” and Arcadian kind. The wrestlers were not attired, as they are now often seen in the heart of Westmoreland, and even Cumberland, in party-coloured tights and fancy jerkins, giving them the air of street acrobats rather than of honest dalesmen; no guerdon was

offered for "the neatest wrestling costume," but men came in their working-day clothes, and when they stepped into the ring, which was open to "all comers," merely threw down their coats and waistcoats, gave their old-fashioned "turnip" watches to a friend to hold, and kicked off their shoes; then—save that when their names were called they rubbed their hands in sawdust, so that they should not slip their "holt"—they were ready for the fray. Of course, there are objections to such sports in any shape, as there are to most things nowadays, thanks to the very superfine tone of our public morality; but if the objectors never amuse themselves in a worse way, they must be what advertising tradesmen term "a selected lot." To a mere ordinary mortal, to whom a little physical rivalry seems no more hurtful than any other form of the competition system, they afford an innocent and agreeable spectacle, though the actors are, no doubt, as Mrs. Campden described them, "vulgar creatures," whose "Sunday best" garments (if they possessed such things at all) are not much better than those that they cast upon the greensward.

They are, after all, fellow-creatures, and it is not uninteresting to watch the play of human nature that accompanies this exhibition of thews and

sinews. How anxiously, when a competitor's name is called, he listens for that of his rival, which, like his own, is drawn at a venture from the hat; and how the face lights up if it is a green-hand, and grows serious if it is a veteran whose laurels are not easily won. To the young ones, especially, who have perhaps entered their names for the first time, this is all-important, as their highest ambition is to live into "the third round," and their hopes of it can only reasonably lie in being opposed to antagonists of their own calibre. It is very unusual, however, for anyone to give up his chance without a contest; a mere stripling will do his best against the last year's "champion," and very tenderly the giant will take him up—and in most cases lay him down. But now and then there is an unexpected resistance; the youthful aspirant is supple and quick; or the slippery grass gives him an advantage, and when all eyes are expecting an easy victory, the giant falls undermost instead of the pigmy. Then a shout of "Bonny lile one" (for little one) breaks forth from the assemblage, that startles the buzzard on the peaks of Bleabarrow; and sometimes a village maiden (his betrothed) will permit herself (for I have seen her do it) to be so far carried away by a natural enthusiasm as to give the "lile one",

another sort of hug than that which he has just experienced, to the admiration of all beholders.

No one "bites the dust" in the Homeric way—in fact, there is none to bite, save what the combatants take up in their hands—and the danger, save of a "ricked" back or a sprained ankle, is slight indeed; but the strain, and the tug, and the tussle—every muscle at its fullest stretch, the legs vibrating, yet stiff as nails, the heart beating at highest pressure, the breath coming in sobs and gasps—are grand to see, and afford the elements of an epic.

The spectacle of it all entranced young Tony to a degree not attained even at the Christmas pantomimes in London, with which he had been familiar from very early years; for here all was reality; and if there were no splendours in the way of glare and glitter, yet the amphitheatre of sky-piercing crags in which the sports were held had a certain majesty even for his boyish eye, while every point in the proceedings was made plain to him by Jeff (who had them at his fingers' ends), an advantage which in the case of the pantomimes was often denied to him, the explanation thereof being beyond the wit of man. If the two youths were thus wrapt up in the combatants of the ring,

their elder companion was equally preoccupied in another fashion: his face was indeed fixed upon the wrestlers, but his mind was busy with the contents of those two little notes we have seen him receive that morning; his thoughts, set in motion by the one, crossed the far-stretching seas, and lighted upon a certain valley, shadowed by a mightier hill than any now beheld by his physical eyes, and canopied by a more cloudless sky; the scenery was that of the tropics, but the skilled hand of the mechanic had been at work therein, and had compelled the mountain-stream to do his bidding; there were water-wheeled stamping-mills, such as are used in Cornwall, and all the apparatus employed in mining enterprises; as Holt beheld it, the mill-wheels were still turning, and the huge hammers at work upon the spalling floors, because he was but recalling a picture that had once actually presented itself to his vision; but he knew that no such busy scene was in truth being enacted in that far-off valley, since the Lara Mine had failed to produce its yield of gold. From Brazil his thoughts would leap to Bampton—for there was a connection between those distant spots—where they could make no such picture for him, because he had no personal acquaintance with the place, but wandered vaguely over booths

and hustings, and excited mobs of men—such as he had seen elsewhere at election-times.

“The two blows together will have a crushing force,” murmured he, not without a touch of pity ; “but he cannot blame me for either.”

Thus it happened that the first contingent from Riverside Hall had their attention so engrossed that they never noticed the arrival of the second in the neighbourhood of the ring, where, indeed, as it had seemed that morning, they would have been about as likely to put in an appearance as the bishop of the diocese to be seen at a man-and-dog-fight.

Moreover, there were other carriages present, and some with ladies in them—for the local gentry and their wives were not all so exclusive in their views as Mrs. Campden—so that the barouche was no very conspicuous object. Mary and Kate enjoyed exceedingly the notion of watching Jeff, and Tony, and Mr. Holt, as they sat, all unconscious of their presence, in the very primitive grand stand—a bank of rough seats with a slanting roof of wood—which was the place of honour ; but Jenny’s whole attention was directed to the sports. For her (as she lay propped upon soft cushions, yet even then not wholly free from pain), the feats of strength and agility of which she was a witness

had a marvellous charm. She was not frightened, as her sister and cousin were, at the crisis of each combat, when one put out his strength to overcome the other, and to bear him to the earth; and when the victory was achieved, and Kate would cry, "Poor fellow! how hard he struggled," in pity for the vanquished, Jenny's tiny palms were doing their best to swell the triumph of the conqueror.

As for Uncle George, his principal occupation was to consult his watch, and calculate how far by this time his wife had probably progressed upon her "calls," and how much, therefore, of margin there was left for them to go home in, and still anticipate her return. Presently, a short stout gentleman rode up to the side of the carriage upon a pony, and addressed the party *en bloc*.

"Well, I never! Who *would* have thought of seeing *you* here? I am sure the sport committee ought to feel flattered. How *did* you get leave, young ladies?"

"We did not get leave, Dr. Curzon," laughed Mary. "Mamma had gone out for a drive——"

"Oh, I see; when the cat's away—I mean—ahem!" and the fat little doctor rubbed his nose, which was enormous, and shot out of his bright black eyes a glance of sly significance at Mr. Campden.

“Well, I thought there could be no possible harm in bringing the girls,” observed that gentleman, apologetically. “We were only driving by—you see the horses have not even been taken out—and just looked in for a few” (he was going to say “minutes,” for the fact is the whole speech was but the rehearsal of what he intended to say, when the time arrived, to Mrs. Campden herself. He would never have the courage, he felt, now that the effects of the stout and sherry had evaporated from his brain, to own the whole truth)——

But luckily at that moment a great shout arose over some prostrate wrestler, and spared him further humiliation by attracting his interlocutor’s attention.

“Capital fall, by jingo!” cried the doctor; “and how long it lasted after they got hold! You were timing it, I see.”

“Two hours and a half,” said Mr. Campden gravely, “or perhaps even three.”

“My dear sir, it was not three minutes. What *are* you thinking of?”

“To be sure, to be sure. I meant three minutes,” stammered the squire, for such he loved to be called by his Bleabarrow neighbours. “A very pretty fall indeed.” He had been thinking of the “margin” so exclusively that he had not even

noticed the contest was decided. "Have you seen our young friends yonder, and Mr. Holt?"

"Not I. I am on my rounds, my good sir—professional duty; only, as I was passing by, I thought I'd just look in—like you—upon these wrestling fellows. I did not expect to find my patient here;" and he turned to Jenny with a look the tenderness of which redeemed his monstrous nose and purple face, and made him almost handsome.

It was a face of great intelligence, notwithstanding its colour—which was solely owing to the inclemencies of the weather, to which his practice exposed him; and among the many advantageous surroundings among which Mr. Campden's lines had fallen, that gentleman justly counted it not the least that Dr. Curzon was his neighbour. One of the greatest drawbacks of a country life is inaccessibility to medical aid, and also the inferior description of that assistance when it is procured; but in Dr. Curzon the tenants of Riverside Hall had a doctor in whom they could have confidence, at their very doors—that is to say, but half-a-dozen miles away by road; and only half that distance if you crossed the river and climbed the crags, and so dropped down upon the doctor's cottage in Sanbeck Valley.

He was welcome everywhere, not only by the sick-bed, but at the dinner-table of those whose state of health never required his professional presence; and nobody that was not quite a newcomer in the neighbourhood would have dreamed of saying that it was "only the doctor" when his staunch little pony, with its heavy burden, came trotting up their carriage-sweep.

"Suppose we say, Uncle George, that you brought me here to see the doctor!" cried Jenny naïvely—"to meet him by appointment at the sports! When the people are not looking, I will show him my tongue, and he shall prescribe for me. Then it will be all right, you know, and no story."

"I don't think that will do," observed Mr. Campden, doubtfully. "No, no; we were just driving out, and looked in; which is, after all, pretty much what happened. There is no occasion to go beyond that. And I really think, my dears, that we had better be turning home."

"But, Uncle George, there's the Guide Race," expostulated Jenny; "you will surely not take us away before we have seen *that*?"

"The Guide Race!" replied Mr. Campden mechanically, as he fingered his repeater. "What is that?"

“Why, squire, you ought to know,” put in Dr. Curzon; “it’s a thing that we are very proud of in this county, because we flatter ourselves it assimilates us to the mountain districts. It makes old Bleabarrow hold its head up to think that it could possibly require the services of a guide, like Helvellyn or Sca Fell. It is but 900 feet, yet it is a stiff climb to that pile of stones yonder; and I doubt whether any of these young fellows will do it in—what shall we say?—”

Mr. Campden’s lips were following the strokes of his repeater, which was talking in his waistcoat-pocket in obedience to its pressure on its handle. “One—two—three—four—aye, and a quarter of an hour,” he answered, nervously.

“I’ll bet you a shilling they don’t do it under the five-and-twenty minutes,” replied the little doctor. “It has never been done under twenty-five since Longstreet’s time, the very neatest cragsman of his time; and the heat to-day is something—Why, what’s the matter, Miss Kate? They’re peeling for the race, that’s all; it’s not a fight.”

“Yes; but look—*look*—there’s Jeff amongst them. Jeff’s going to run. How very angry Mrs. Campden will be with him!”

“Pooh, pooh!” answered the doctor, sharply; “let her be angry—I mean she has no right to be

anything of the sort. Why, it is very creditable to the young fellow to show such pluck ; and I hope he won't be the last in."

"O papa !" cried Mary, "*do* you see what Geoffrey is doing ? "

"I see he's taking off his coat and waistcoat ; and I should like to do the same," said Mr. Campden. "'I would take off my flesh, and sit in my bones,' as somebody says, 'this weather, if the arrangements of nature permitted of it.'"

"But he is going to *run*, papa."

"Ah, there I think he's a fool, Polly ; I wouldn't run."

"But he is going to join in the Guide Race up the hill—to run for money."

"He is *not*, Mary," cried Kate, decisively ; "I am quite certain that Jeff would not do that. The race is open to everybody, and he wishes to try his speed against the others, that's all. You don't suppose he would take any of the prizes, even if he won them, away from these poor people ? "

"At all events, I am sure mamma will be exceedingly put out," said Mary ; "but, of course, if papa has no objection——"

"Eh, ah !" said Mr. Campden, who had once more abandoned himself to his apprehensions.

“What is that you are saying about your mother? What the deuce is the matter now?”

“Nothing is the matter, Uncle George, except that I want your arm,” said Jenny, gaily. “I *must* stand up to see this, and you know I can’t do that without your help. There’s a dear good uncle; and now don’t you move one inch till all is over. There are six of them, and Geoffrey makes the seventh. Now I call this delightful. There’s our dear friend Mr. Holt—how I should like to see *him* run up the crags—and Tony looking at Jeff as though he were a demi-god.”

“And, upon my life, he looks like one,” cried Dr. Curzon, admiringly. “Step on the seat, my dear Miss Kitty, and lean on *me*; the pony will stand quite still, for he has been used to be shot over, though not by such bright eyes as yours. Now, I call that the model of a young fellow. Who is that he has just given his watch to, to take care of? I hope he’s an honest man.”

“My *dear* Dr. Curzon,” said Mary, reprovingly, “that is Mr. Holt; a friend of papa’s, or rather of Mr. Dalton’s. Did you not see him at the charades last night?”

“I daresay I might have seen him, Miss Mary, but I did not notice him. The fact is, my atten-

tion was wholly monopolised by a couple of pretty housemaids; the fairest, flirtiest little—— Now, don't you push me off the pony. Mr. Campden, I wish you'd speak to these two girls."

"Speak! you might as well speak to the winds," answered the squire, his large arm enfolding Jenny's waist with clumsy tenderness. "Gad! you don't mean to say, doctor, they're going straight up yonder, between those flags? Why, at this distance, it seems almost perpendicular!"

"Seems? nay, it *is*," exclaimed the doctor, "as you shall see. Here's an opera-glass, which I brought for the very purpose; and if Miss Jenny will honour me by using it—— We'll call it a stethoscope at home, if you please: the doctor brought his stethoscope to the sports, as agreed upon. Eh, squire?"

"Yes; it is all very well for old bachelors to joke about other people's wives," grunted Mr. Campden; "but, by Jove! if you had married Julia, and had taken her barouche to a prize-fight—that's what she supposes this sort of thing to be—you'd be as glad of an excuse as I am. Thank goodness, they're starting at last. You don't care to see more than the start, do you, girls?"

"Uncle George!" cried Jenny, earnestly, "I

must see this race out; I never felt so excited in my life."

"Which must be very bad for you, my dear Jenny."

"Not a bit of it," said the doctor; "it will do her all the good in the world. Guide races are recommended by the faculty for her particular complaint, which, as you see, is mostly 'temper.'"

"He's over the wall!" cried Kitty, enthusiastically.

"Like a bird," ejaculated the doctor. "If it was 'Fire!' they could not have done it quicker—the whole seven—nor have had much less on them," added he, *sotto voce*.

"By jingo! but they're close together; you could cover them with a handkerchief!" cried the squire, roused to unwonted interest in the proceedings. "There, now; they're scattering a bit. Now the pace begins to tell, and the amateur to succumb to the professional. It's a case of 'bellows to mend,' I fear, with Master Jeff."

"Not a bit of it," answered the doctor, indignantly; "he is only going round the wood instead of through it, which is the quicker way, although the longer. See; two of them have followed his lead. Jeff has got good wits as well as good wind, let me tell you."

Kitty's little hand was leaning on the doctor's shoulder, though up to this point he had scarcely been aware of it; and now he felt it lean *hard*. She was thanking him by that silent pressure for his defence of her favourite.

The scene had now become very exciting. The seven competitors had already reached the high ground, yet did not in the least relax their speed; a thicket of brushwood immediately intervened, into which four plunged, whose heads and shoulders could be seen making way through it, at a diminished rate; the three others ran round, and were first upon the other side, the young blacksmith of Sanbeck leading; then Jeff; then a certain gamekeeper, said to be able to tire out any sportsman upon moor or fell.

Dr. Curzon gave a short biography of each of the half-dozen champions, with whose career he was perfectly familiar. "I shall be able to certify that Master Jeff's rivals were all eminently respectable members of society," concluded he, slyly, in Mr. Campden's ear.

"Tush!" said the squire; "let me enjoy the race."

When the first climbers got to the steep rocks between the flags, they had become to the naked eye little more than moving specks; and Jenny

alone could make them clearly out by help of the glass. "The blacksmith is still ahead," said she; "and Jeff is shoulder to shoulder with the other man. What did you call him, doctor?"

"Well, I said he was a gamekeeper; between ourselves, Miss Jenny" (this he whispered), "he's a poacher."

"He's an uncommonly good climber, at all events," said Jenny, admiringly. "But Jeff goes like a chamois too."

"Let me have the glass a moment," said Kitty, softly. Her heart was beating almost as quickly as poor Jeff's, who was doing a very nasty bit of crag-work; it looked as steep as a wall, even to her—to the others it was like a window-pane with three flies upon it. Not a hundred feet above it was the pile of stones—marking the summit of the hill—which each had to round before beginning the race home. She had gazed upon it from her own room at the Hall a hundred times, but henceforward it would have a personal interest for her. What endurance, what fatigue, was he not undergoing! Matched against grown men like these, and all (as she well knew, in spite of Mary's ill-natured remarks) for the honour of the thing; for there *was* honour in it. "He's down!" exclaimed she eagerly.

"Who's down? Not Jeff!" cried Jenny.

"Jeff? No!" returned Kitty, contemptuously; "it's the blacksmith."

"Poor fellow!" said Mary; "he has not hurt himself, I hope."

"You had better go up and see," said Jenny, rather rudely; "for my part, I should like them all to slip except Jeff."

"Oh, so would I," said Mary, "so far as that goes."

"That is the true female view of justice," chuckled the doctor. "As for you, Kitty, you would like them all to have apoplectic fits, would you not?"

"No, sir; I should like Jeff to win, but to do it fairly."

The doctor patted approvingly the hand that rested on his shoulder; forgetting that Kitty had quitted her hold to take possession of the glass.

"You need not squeeze *my* fingers, Dr. Curzon," said Mary, comprehending his error.

"You need not talk about it, my dear, if I did," answered the doctor, imperturbably; he had been nearly half a century in practice as a medical man, and was not easily put out by a mistake.

"He is round the stones," exclaimed Kitty; "both of them. Now they are coming to the steep

place again—oh, surely they won't run down *that*. I cannot look at them."

"Give *me* the glass," cried Jenny, importunately. It was popularly understood that she was "all nerves," but her hand was steady enough as she brought the instrument to bear upon the returning athletes. "Jeff and the gamekeeper are far ahead," said she; "they are coming like the wind. Well *done!* Oh, I wish I was a man like you, Uncle George, that I could add, 'By jingo!'"

"Why, what's the matter, lass?" asked the squire.

"Jeff has just jumped a boulder like a deer: they are leaping from stone to stone, as the water comes down the fall in wet weather. I would rather be able to leap like that than anything in the world."

The doctor pursed his lips, and gave a little sigh, but Jenny neither saw nor heard him.

"If nothing happens, one of these two will win. Think of that, Kitty; Jeff will be second, at all events. Oh dear, oh dear! they cannot stop themselves."

"Good heavens! what has happened?" cried the squire. Kitty did not speak, but the doctor felt both her hands suddenly clutch his shoulder.

“Why, they’ll have to go through the wood, instead of round it.”

“Is that all? You gave me such a turn,” said Mary, pettishly.

“That is just what they could not give *themselves*,” said Kitty: “they are coming right through the copse, instead of round it.”

“They are wise,” said the doctor; “they have the ground with them this journey. By Jove! it’s a fine race.”

By this time the two leading figures were well in sight; and a mighty cheer burst from the excited throng of spectators, as now the one and now the other seemed to have a few feet of vantage. A stone wall lay before them, then a piece of slanting turf, below which was a gully, into which both had descended on their way up—it being of course impossible to clear it from that direction. After that was the “run in” over a level grass-field, with another stone wall at the finish. Both topped the first wall at the same instant, and then the game-keeper began to lead: it was plain that though not more agile among the crags, he was a trifle more speedy on the turf than his younger competitor. He would certainly be first at the gap that led down into the gully, and consequently first out of it, after which, barring accidents, the race would be

his. The party from the Hall could discern this as clearly as the umpire himself, and a gloom fell upon them accordingly.

A roar of exultation suddenly arose.

"By gad! Jeff's going to jump it," cried the squire, excitedly.

"He's going to *try* it," murmured the doctor, mechanically putting his hand to his pocket, to feel if his case of instruments was in its accustomed place. "He'll break his legs, if not his neck."

Jeff's plan was indeed a desperate one. Finding himself out-paced by his rival, he had avoided the gap altogether, and was making straight for the gully at its highest point, intending to treat it as a ditch. If he cleared it, he would not only save something of the distance, but all the time which the other would consume in descending and ascending. But if he did *not* clear it, there would be twenty feet of fall upon a stony bottom—the bed, in fact, of a dry torrent.

On he came, like a race-horse; there was no time to pull himself together, nor even "to think about it" (as Jeff himself afterwards allowed, in depreciation of his own feat); and the next instant, that apprehensive "Ah-h-h-h!" arose from the spectators, such as salutes all "deeds of derring-do" while in progress, followed instantaneously by the

shout which proclaims success. Jeff had alighted upon the tips of his toes at the very verge of the chasm; there was not an inch of margin; but he had done it; and now he was half-way across the field before his rival had emerged from the gully.

“ Oh, Jeff, dear Jeff, I never liked you so much before ! ” cried Jenny, her frail limbs “ all of a tremble,” and the tears running down her cheeks like rain. “ Was it not plucky of him, Kitty ? ”

But Kitty could not have spoken had she been offered, like “ Conversation ” Coleridge, half-a-crown for every word. Her face was white, and her eyes seemed to start forth to meet the victorious boy, as he climbed over the last stone wall, not so lightly as he had crossed it last—but yet without signs of positive distress—and ran in to the goal the winner by half-a-dozen seconds.

“ Back, back ! ” cried the doctor, riding in among the people that were pressing around the lad and cheering him vociferously. “ Give him room and air.”

Then presently he reappeared at the side of the barouche.

“ The boy is well enough, but awfully ‘ pumped ’ and exhausted. It is my opinion ”—and when the doctor used that form of words, he meant what he said—“ that he would be none the better for

receiving your congratulations just at present, young ladies. He does not even know you're here, you see——”

“Ay, then we had better be off before he finds it out,” put in the squire, eagerly. “Then we shall get nicely home before—that is, in time to receive your mother, Mary.”

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

“SOME one has been to call,” observed Mrs. Campden to her companion, as, driving up the carriage-sweep within an hour or so of dinner-time, her sharp eyes remarked the recent traces of wheel and hoof. “I should not wonder if it was Lady Blanche Ealing.”

“Mr. Holt and the boys were going to the sports, were they not?” returned Mrs. Dalton, not, it must be confessed, with any signs of overpowering interest in the question; for the last two hours her thoughts had been at home—watching for her husband’s telegram; and neither the calls, nor her companion’s conversation, had been able to secure the attention which she would fain have given to them.

“My *dear* Edith”—she spoke with an emphasis dictated by a due sense of the fitness of things—“you don’t suppose I should have sent out

anything but the dog-cart with that Mr. Holt? There has been a pair of horses here—look at the hoof-marks. It is very annoying if it has been Lady Blanche, for that will be the second time I have missed her. Such a charming person; the Earl of Beefampton's daughter, and, socially speaking, *the* lady of this part of the county. Who has called, Marks?" asked she of the butler, who received them at the hall door.

"No one, ma'am—leastways, Mr. Dimple came on some business about the church-sittings; but it would do just as well, I was to say, with his compliments, another day."

"But some carriage has been here, beside the dog-cart."

"Oh yes, ma'am; the barouche. Master took out the young ladies in it."

"Is there any message for me, Marks?" inquired Mrs. Dalton, unable any longer to bear her suspense, though unwilling enough to interrupt the inquiries of her hostess.

"Yes, ma'am; a telegram: Miss Jenny has it." The invalid girl had been for so many years a child-guest at Riverside, that in old Mark's eyes she was still Miss Jenny, and would probably remain so for ever. "She is up in her own room, I think, ma'am."

Mrs. Dalton flew upstairs to the apartment thus indicated, where she found Jenny upon her spring-couch—the unwonted fatigues of the day having somewhat exhausted her frail frame.

“O mamma! there is a telegram from papa.”

“What is it, child?” inquired her mother, anxiously. Jenny put the slip of paper in her hand without speaking.

“*Shall come by the 6.30 train, as proposed. Nomp.*”

“Why, what does he mean by *Nomp*?”

“I am afraid it means he is not elected: he wished us to understand, without telling others, that he was no M.P.; at least, that is what I make it out to be.”

“Dear, dear!” sighed Mrs. Dalton.

“I am very sorry, upon papa’s account, mamma, because I am afraid he will be disappointed; but except for that—you know we have often agreed that he will be happier as he is.”

Mrs. Dalton did not reply, but withdrew at once to her own room. There was something in the bareness of the communication she had just received—though telegrams are not expected to be effusive—that chilled her, and seemed to give an

additional seriousness to the missive of the morning. The latter had enjoined silence upon her as regarded her husband's anticipations of the election, and even now that it was over he seemed to have a disinclination to make known the result. What did this reticence augur in one who had been wont—until of late months—to be the most frank and demonstrative of men? It was true that he had given utterance to no expression of annoyance, but the brevity of his message spoke to her in language that she alone understood, of the chagrin and bitterness that he was enduring. "No M.P." was all he had said; but no "Form" with which the Telegraph Company could have supplied her would have been sufficient to contain her paraphrase of those few letters. She was consumed with vague apprehensions upon his account; for she knew not *why* her husband should be thus cast down, and that was the most bitter thought of all. She was far too wise, however, to consult upon such a matter with a third person, or to allow others to read her anxiety; and she presently descended to the drawing-room, to await her husband's arrival, as though only dinner had been in prospect. She found the rest of the company already assembled there, and became at once conscious that something unpleasant had occurred

among them. The quarter of an hour before dinner-time is proverbially an embarrassing period, but it was obvious that on this particular occasion it had been a very uncomfortable one. Her first glance, mother-like, was given to her own belongings, and so far as they were concerned, it seemed that the explosion—which had certainly taken place, for the air was still heavy with the smoke of it—had spared them, whatever harm it had wrought to others. Jenny was on the sofa, with a book before her eyes, which would not have been the case—for she was bold as a lion—had she been under fire; Kate, with a flushed cheek, was looking out of the window, to avoid, as her mother guessed, gazing on the victim under punishment; Tony was standing by her with his hand fast clutched in hers, but his glowing face turned towards the scene of action; Mary Campden was smoothing her gown, an action she used whenever ill at ease: all these, it was evident, were non-combatants. At the mantelpiece, with her back to the ferns and flowers which filled the useless grate, stood the mistress of the house, and by her side its so-called master was twirling his whiskers as though he would have twirled them off; and at some distance stood Jeff, with a pale face and angry eyes.

“I am sorry to say, Edith,” said Mrs. Campden,

addressing the new-comer, with gravity, "that my husband has thought proper—if the word proper can be applied to such a proceeding in any wise—to take your daughters with his own to Bleabarrow sports."

"Dear me! I am afraid my girls must have worried him very much to induce him to do it," said Mrs. Dalton, good-naturedly.

"That is just what we did, mamma," said Jenny, looking up for an instant from her book; "it was all our fault, but mine especially."

"If my husband means to excuse his conduct at the expense of two young ladies——"

"There were three," observed Mary, quickly; "it was I who was most to blame, because I ought to have known you would not have liked it, mamma."

"I am not addressing myself to you, Mary, at all," continued her mother with dignity; "be so good as not to interrupt me. I say it was shameful to take advantage of my absence, Mr. Campden, to order the barouche and take these girls on such an abominable expedition. It is natural, Edith, being my guest, that you should endeavour to make light of it."

"But, indeed, Julia, I don't think it any serious matter," answered Mrs. Dalton; "and, of

course, the girls would be quite safe in your husband's charge, in case of any annoyance."

"Well, well; you are easily satisfied, Edith," returned the other lady, throwing up her hands; "but if you knew what *I* know about such places—what I can't *help* knowing from my position here—the sort of people that attend them——"

"There was Lord Riversdale," observed Mr. Campden, drily.

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear it. But not his wife, sir."

"I am sure I don't know whether she was his wife," said Uncle George, still more drily; "there was a youngish woman with him."

"Do not heighten your disgraceful conduct by disreputable talk, I *beg*," answered Mrs. Campden, icily. "I am quite sure that there was no *lady* at Bleabarrow, except those you took there in *my* barouche."

"I really don't think that the girls can have taken much hurt, dear Julia," reiterated Mrs. Dalton, the peace-maker.

"I don't know as to *hurt*, Edith; but I suppose even your good-nature would draw the line *somewhere*. What would you have said, for instance, if any gentleman of your acquaintance had not only gone to such a place as Bleabarrow, but taken

part in the sports? entered as a competitor with drunken persons——”

“My good lady, no drunken person can run up hills,” remonstrated Uncle George; “you don’t know what you are talking about — you don’t, indeed.”

“Oh, thank you! I’m sure you are the pink of courtesy; as polite a husband as you have shown yourself a judicious father. However, I was addressing myself to Edith. I was asking what she would think if you, or any one of your guests here, should have taken it into their head to compete with such ruffians?”

“Well, really, I can’t imagine Mr. Campden doing that,” said Mrs. Dalton; “and, of course, it would be very indecorous——”

“The height of indecorum,” interrupted Mrs. Campden, looking round triumphantly; “there; were not these my very words? You see, Mr. Geoffrey Derwent, that even those who are generally most ready to excuse you, have nothing to urge in extenuation of your conduct. Mrs. Dalton quite agrees with me—that for a person in your position, an inmate of this house, and who has always been treated as one of the family, to compete with common men for gain——”

“I did not compete for gain,” said Geoffrey,

indignantly ; "I gave the money—it was three pounds—to the man that came in second, and only kept the belt."

"That is, you did not take what you had really need of—you threw away, forsooth, three golden sovereigns, like a young millionaire — and only indulged yourself by mixing with the lowest of the low——"

"It was by my advice, Mrs. Campden," said one, in cold and measured tones.

At the window, close to where Kate was, Mrs. Dalton perceived for the first time that Mr. Holt was also standing, half concealed by the curtain-folds. "I own it was foolish and injudicious, but it was I who proposed that the young gentleman should enter himself for the Guide Race."

"That had nothing to do with it," said Jeff, sturdily ; "I always meant to run, and should have done so whether anyone had proposed it or not."

"Of course you would," continued Mrs. Campden, contemptuously ; "to mix, as I have said, with the lowest of the low, and to earn their good opinion, was your only motive."

"What ! has Jeff been electioneering, like me ?" cried a lively and genial voice. The speaker, who stood at the open door, had a bright and buoyant look, which by contrast with the faces around him,

seemed to typify good-humour and ignore all angry passion.

“Oh, John, how glad I am to see you!” whispered Mrs. Dalton, as she sprang into his arms.

“Oh, papa!” cried Kate, delightedly. Everybody in the room, including, perhaps, even Mrs. Campden herself, who had shot off all her sharpest arrows, seemed pleased to see John Dalton at that moment.

Having kissed his wife, he turned at once to Jenny, to prevent her rising to receive him, and embraced Kate and Tony, and then made his salutations to the rest, like one who is used to be welcomed. A more conventional man would have addressed his hostess first, and his own family afterwards; but Dalton always behaved as his instincts prompted him, and they fortunately happened to be good. He had not a handsome face, nor even an aristocratic one, yet it was one which attracted every eye. If you had seen him in the pit of a theatre (where, however, you never *would* have seen him, for he was not a man to patronise the pit), or on the crowded platform of a public meeting, you would have asked straightway, “Who is that man?” He had passed middle-life, and his face and forehead were deeply lined; but neither, as you would have said, by

thought nor care, so genial was the smile upon his lip, so lively the sparkle of his eye. His complexion was dark to swarthinness; his hair, worn much longer than was customary, though he had neither moustache nor whiskers, was black as jet; yet so far from this producing a sombre effect, his appearance suggested gaiety. If he was not laughing, he always looked about to laugh, not *at* but *with* you; his air and manner suggested not only the desire to please, but sympathy, and the readiest comprehension of your tastes and character. He was not conciliatory, for if you showed antagonism—or even a slowness in reciprocating his advances—the sunshine left his face at once, and he set you down as a fool or a knave. I am bound to say, though sometimes guilty of a grave injustice in these hasty judgments, he was generally right. It was said by morose and ill-natured persons that John Dalton could be as “nasty” in temper as anybody; but this was not true; he was hasty, however, and impetuous, and holding a deep-seated conviction that the man who could quarrel with so agreeable a fellow as himself must needs be a scoundrel, he behaved towards him accordingly. This conviction was a dogma of which—though more true than most dogmas—he had not been persuaded in a moment; a long course of

social success had induced it. Dalton had had neither high birth nor much money to recommend him to the notice of the world, yet had possessed enough of both to render a struggle for existence or position unnecessary; he had not wasted time in setting his feet on the lower rungs of the ladder, but had had them placed there by his father, who had been a man of fashion and a hanger-on of the Court for a quarter of a century before his death. The sayings of "Tom Dalton" had been considerably quoted before the reputation of his son in the same line of business had caused them to pale and fade away from the recollection of Pall Mall. Some old fogies were still found in that cynical neighbourhood who averred that John Dalton was not, after all, so clever a fellow as his father; but such remarks were justly ascribed to the disposition of persons of a certain age to praise the past at the expense of the present. He did not, indeed, possess the biting satire for which his parent, the friend and rival of Brummell, was distinguished—though if you trod upon his tail ever so slightly, he could give an epigrammatic snap that had marked more than one heedless gentleman for life—but his ordinary talk was bright and vivacious, and he was voted "good company" wherever he went. By profession he was a bar-

rist, but he had never practised, or given himself the chance of practising. He had never done anything but please himself in all his life, yet in so doing had somehow contrived to please everybody else; not so much from his kind heart nor his good-nature (though he could boast of both) as from a certain nameless charm of manner, which won over to him both man and woman. He was not a hero, nor anything at all like it; but if he had been one, his *valet de chambre* would have been the first to acknowledge it. He was not a prophet (for he little knew what was at this moment awaiting himself); but if he had been one, his own people would not have denied him honour. His wife was devoted to him, his children adored him; and their sentiments had his fullest concurrence. "If people are only nice to me," he once confided to a friend, "I am the nicest fellow people can meet."

Unhappily, there are some people that cannot be nice, however certain may be the reciprocity; and Mr. John Dalton had just been experiencing that fact during his canvass of the electors of Bampton.

"Well, Dalton, may we congratulate you as a British senator, or not?" was Mr. Campden's inquiry as he shook hands with his guest.

"You may congratulate me, my dear fellow as having escaped being the representative of the most rascally constituency in England. It was a very narrow shave, however," added the speaker, briskly; "another half-dozen votes would have done it."

Mr. Campden whistled mournfully, and the rest began to express their condolences after their several fashions, when Mrs. Dalton broke promptly in with "John, dear, there is scarcely time, even as it is, for you to dress for dinner."

"I know that, my darling, and therefore I am not going to do it," whispered he.

"But Mrs. Campden is *so* particular."

"I know that too; but I'm not going to dress. Pray do not wait for me one minute, ladies and gentlemen," added he aloud, and then left the room; not sorry, perhaps, notwithstanding all his presence of mind, that he had got over the declaration of his failure.

"My husband hopes you will excuse a morning costume to-night, Julia," said Mrs. Dalton. "Nothing distresses him so much as coming in late for dinner, or keeping anybody waiting."

"Oh, certainly," returned Mrs. Campden, with a stately inclination of her head. She was pretty well aware how the case stood, and felt satisfied

to get an apology out of Mr. Dalton even by proxy. He was indolent, as regarded all physical exertion, and despised the small conventionalities on which his hostess set such store. She knew, or thought she knew, that all the members of "county families" dressed for dinner every night, and was therefore resolved that her own folks should do so. So poor Uncle George—who during his early life had never worn "black things," as he called them, except on the rarest occasions—had every day to divest himself of his light summer clothing and put on broadcloth.

Mr. Holt was always attired with the most scrupulous regard to the fitness of things; and Dalton, as her guest, ought to have been amenable to her wishes in this respect; but it was really very difficult, she complained, "to get him to conform to the most ordinary usages of society." She did not dare to be imperative with him, for he was one of the few people of whom she stood in dread; and when she had once attempted to what she was pleased to call reason with him, he had upset her with an epigram, which, if she had understood, she would have termed "very conceited." "Madam, nobody minds what is one's suit so long as one is a *trump*." Upon the whole, Mrs. Campden had her reasons for not liking Mr.

Dalton, but she liked to have him at Riverside, from the popularity which his presence conferred upon it. She had more invitations from the county families—who, she had her suspicions, looked down upon her husband for being a *nouveau riche*—when the Daltons were with them, and a better chance of getting a morning call from Lady Blanche Ealing; nor was it without some gratification that she found John Dalton taking her into dinner, though his conversation flew over her head, and did not interest her half so much as the proceedings of the servants, or the state of the *entrées*. On the present occasion he was full of the topic of the election—not that he liked it, but lest he should be supposed to shrink from it as a sore subject—and very amusing in his description of his rival (and conqueror), one Mr. Griggs. This gentleman, who was no great orator, had accused him of “labouring under the advantage” of being a skilled legal debater, which was certainly a most unjust imputation, as Dalton had but once opened his lips in court in his life, and then only to move for a rule.

Griggs had also described Mr. Disraeli as being “the greatest *living* statesman of this or any other age.” And Griggs had also told a story on the platform so discursive that it had touched upon

almost everything, yet had somehow not arrived at the point. During the progress of it a voice—a somewhat thick and drunken voice, but still one with an evidently Liberal tone—had interrupted this narrative by a conversation with an imaginary friend, one “Samuel,” supposed to be at the other end of the town-hall, which was crammed with Griggs’ supporters. As the story went on and on, the voice grew more and more dolorous, and at last inquired: “Samuel, do you *like* this story?”—a question answered by such a peal of laughter, even from his best friends, as to destroy Mr. Griggs’ eloquence for the remainder of that evening.

It was by no means John Dalton’s habit to monopolise the conversation, and it was only by public request that he now communicated these particulars; but he had never seemed in higher spirits. Only two persons at table were aware that he was acting a part, nor could one of these have detected it, but for certain exclusive information that he possessed. Mrs. Dalton, on the other hand, knew that her husband was “not himself,” although ignorant of the precise nature of what troubled him. Behind those sprightly tones, that joyous laugh, she detected that Black Care was sitting. The subtle instinct of much love had discovered it to her, else there was nothing to

indicate it, except perhaps an unwonted grimness in her husband's humour.

For example, Mr. Campden had inquired of him, since he had been last in London, whether town was empty.

"No, sir; there are still several toiling millions there, of our own flesh and blood."

The tone of the Platform, the air of the would-be Representative, were admirably assumed: it was evident that the speaker was still contending with Griggs for the suffrages of the Bampton free-men.

"The club, however, had nobody in it, I suppose," continued the laughing host, "except Disnay?"

"Disnay is out of town."

"Oh! that is impossible, Dalton: he told me himself that he had not left London for a quarter of a century, and then only to visit Brighton. Oh! Disnay *can't* be out of town."

"He is, however, I do assure you—since there are no intramural interments—for he is dead!"

"Oh! Mr. Dalton, how shocking!" ejaculated Mrs. Campden.

"Yes, indeed, madam; but the gentleman could not help it. If you had known him as well as your husband and myself did, you would feel sure

of that. He had no desire for change—except in one respect. Even when he dined alone on a mutton chop, he *would* always dress for dinner.”

“And very right, too, I think, Mr. Dalton.”

“No doubt, madam; and I hope he is at this moment reaping the reward of such undeviating propriety.”

“Well, I am sorry poor old Disnay is gone,” sighed Mr. Campden. “We might better have spared a better man.”

“I can’t understand how *that* can be, George,” observed the hostess severely.

“When did the poor old fellow go off the hooks?” asked Mr. Campden, too affected to notice a reproof which, under other circumstances, would have reduced him to silence.

“Well, his ghost was seen at half-past seven last Thursday.”

“His ghost!” echoed several voices.

“Yes, it was seen coming into the club at what had been his usual dinner-hour.”

“Oh, what nonsense!” cried Mrs. Campden. “How did they know it *was* his ghost?”

“Well, they knew it was not himself, because he was in morning costume. Everybody said that Disnay must be dead; and what everybody says must be true.”

I don't think Mrs. Campden "liked that story," any more than friend Samuel liked that narrative of Mr. Griggs; but to the rest of the company it seemed droll enough.

When the ladies had withdrawn, John Dalton was even still more amusing; but it is my opinion that the talk of us men "after dinner" should be as sacred as the conversation in the drawing-room, that takes place during the same period among the fair sex, and which has never been revealed to mortal man. The talk was mainly between John and his host, for Mr. Holt said little. He was turning over in his mind what he should say presently in the smoking-room, or rather how he should say it, when he and Dalton should be left alone together.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOB'S COMFORTER.

THE question of whether a "little music" after dinner is socially a desirable thing or not, has been much debated; we know what a certain statesman thought of it—but then he was very bitter against every species of occupation that was not "improving." Musical people, of course, like to hear the piano going—if the performer understands her art—and there are a number of other persons who like to be thought musical, even if they are not, who hold their fingers up, and whisper "Hush!" during the performance, and when it is over exclaim, "Oh, *thank* you;" as if the notes had been five-pound ones, and they had pocketed them all. Nor do the rest of the company much *mind* it, if the pieces played are not too long. Old gentlemen will go on with their gossip much as usual, and old ladies will keep time with their heads quite cleverly, until they

drop asleep, to be presently awakened by the sudden silence. But if there are any present with a hidden care, it is curious how often their secret is disclosed by a few bars of music. They can no longer laugh or talk, but are left the prey of the anxiety within, and it comes out in the expression of their face, and in their very posture. Those earnest lines—

Dear friend, whom, grave or gay, we seek,
Heaven-holding shrine,
I ope thee, touch thee, hear thee speak,
And peace is mine—

were addressed to his piano, by a true lover of it; and such persons, even when dejected, may be soothed by its sweet tones; but that is not the case with those who have no particular taste for music. It makes their sad thoughts more gloomy, while it takes away from them the opportunities of disguise. From John Dalton's face the smile has fallen away like a dropped mask, as he leans an elbow on the mantelpiece, and listens, or seems to listen, in the drawing-room at Riverside, to his daughter's singing. Kitty has a fine voice, which goes a great way up, and comes a long way down, and goes on without stopping for breath almost as long as a camel can go without water. Mr. Holt, who is turning over her leaves, finds that post no

sinecure, and being utterly ignorant of music, is never quite sure when she has reached the bottom of the page. Moreover, he cannot keep his eyes from wandering to that statuesque figure by the fireplace, that looks so cast down even now—when it has not yet heard the worst, nor even half the worst, that must needs be told to-night. Others in the room have their troubles: Jeff, pretending to be immersed in a book, is frowning over the top of it at Mr. Holt, who must, he thinks, be an idiot not to see when a young lady would rather turn over her leaves for herself; and Tony, only enduring the music as a lesser evil than going to bed, which, as he is well aware, would be the alternative. The windows are open, and he would gladly be in the open air, but the rain is falling, as it often does at Riverside, so that that avenue of escape is barred. Mr. Campden has fallen asleep, which is foolish of him, as he will be all the more wakeful when the time arrives for his curtain-lecture, when all the wickedness of his afternoon's expedition will be expatiated upon over again; but the rest of the company are enthralled by the melody. Jenny is lying on the sofa with her eyes closed, in silent ecstasy, for the voice and the instrument are both perfection in their way; Mrs. Campden and Mary give still

more demonstrative signs of approval; and Mrs. Dalton has yet an added bliss as the mother of the singer. Every now and then, however, she steals a glance at her husband, and then that look of maternal triumph fades away.

"John, dear, you must, be very tired," she says tenderly, when the little concert is over and the ladies are retreating: "I hope you will not have more than one cigar to-night."

"I had some sleep in the train, and feel dreadfully lively," he answers, brightening up; "and I have got some business to discuss with Holt, so I am afraid I shall not be very early; be sure you don't sit up for me, darling."

"George," says Mrs. Campden, "you hear that Mr. Dalton and Mr. Holt have private affairs to talk about, so that there is no excuse for you spending half the night in the smoking-room. I am astonished at your permitting Geoffrey to accompany you to such a place at all."

"I do it as a warning," answers the host; "that he may observe for himself thus early the pernicious effects of tobacco."

"It is easy to joke upon all subjects; but you are giving him a taste which is deleterious in itself, and which in after-life he will not be in a position to gratify."

“My dear, he has got it already,” replies Mr. Campden, as he troops off with the other males to the divan.

Under the apprehension of punishment, Uncle George would sometimes break into what those who did not know him would deem next kin to rebellion, but which was, in fact, only that state of wildness which prompts a man in for a penny to go in for a pound. There was still a cigar—which habit would enable him to enjoy—between him and the curtain-lecture.

The smoking-room at Riverside was a model of what such a place should be; it was on the upper floor, yet not so high up as to inconvenience those of mature age and impaired digestion who sought it after dinner; its windows commanded a glorious view of hill and river, when to look out was pleasurable; and when snugness and warmth were desirable, it possessed every element of comfort. It had lounging-chairs, rocking-chairs, conversation-chairs; and three sides of the room were lined with books, bound with great elegance, but all of small bulk, so as to be easily held in the hand. It was said by Mr. Campden’s detractors that his upholsterer had supplied these books with the rest of the fittings; but that was of small consequence, if he had not written them; they were, at all events,

far better chosen than what we find on the bookshelves of most smoking-rooms, which are but too often the "Sporting Review," in fifty volumes, and the old "Gentleman's Magazine." There was a sunlight in the ceiling, for use on winter-nights; but at present the apartment was lit by shaded lamps, placed on small round tables.

"Well, as these two gentlemen want to talk business, Jeff," said Mr. Campden, as they all lit their cigars, "you and I will have a turn at billiards."

The billiard-room and the smoking-room communicated with one another by double doors, one of which was of green baize, and through these the host and his young friend at once disappeared, leaving Holt and Dalton together. They sat down opposite to one another, at a table by the open window, with their legs stretched out before them, and their coffee by their side; to all appearance, a very cosy couple. In front of them rose the crags of Bleabarrow, just silvered by the rising moon. For a minute or two nothing broke the silence save the babble of the river, and the dull and almost noiseless click of the balls in the next room; both men's faces lay in shadow, but it could be seen that Dalton was gazing on the scene without, while Holt's elbow leaned on the table, and his eyes were shaded by his hand.

"This Bampton business is a devilish awkward one for me, Holt."

"Yes, indeed."

"I fear it will have a bad effect with some of the doubtful ones. It was so important to appear to be important just at this crisis. And I spoke so confidently about the matter at the Board."

"You had a right to feel confident."

"Of course I had. If a score of those fellows had not turned out to be the greatest liars upon earth—Jenkins and Fuller, for example, voted dead against me, though I had their written promise. I have got evidence against Griggs with respect to Fuller. There never was a clearer case of bribery in this world."

"You are not thinking of a petition, however, are you?"

"Well, no; that would, under the circumstances, be sending good money after bad."

"If you unseated Griggs, they would have a shot at you, you mean?"

"Perhaps; though I don't think they would hit me; but the fact is, I have got no money to petition *with*."

"The thing stood you in more than you expected, then?"

"My good sir, it cost me twice as much—three

times. When it came to the last pinch, neither of us cared how deeply we were dipped. It was like being 'pricked' at whist. I could not have imagined that there was such an excitement in the thing."

"Many a great family has been crippled for generations, my dear Dalton, at the same game."

"That is no sort of consolation to me."

"Of course not; I only meant that you showed no unusual weakness in putting the pot on; that you have nothing, in fact, to reproach yourself with."

"By heavens! but I have, Holt. It was not ambition, it is true, that sent me down to Bampton, but it was a piece of business of a very speculative kind. I feel that now, when the thing has gone the wrong way, I do assure you. Mind, I don't blame you, but I ought never to have risked it."

"Indeed, my dear Dalton, you should not blame me: my ideas, as you know, by no means coincided with yours upon the matter."

A short sharp laugh broke from Dalton's lips. "You are not going to say that you always advised me not to go to Bampton, and prophesied what would come of it, are you?"

"Not at all, my good friend. But I protest against being considered the cause of your calam-

ity. For my part, I thought your election a certainty, and, considering your position and prospects, well worth any reasonable sum. *Voilà tout.*"

"Let's stick to plain 'English,'" answered Dalton, sharply, "which anybody can perceive is your mother-tongue."

Mr. Holt's pronunciation of the French language was imperfect, and the way he threw his hands out in deprecation of his friend's remarks was certainly not a good imitation of continental "action;" but the reproof seemed unnecessarily severe.

"It is plain that you are out of temper, Dalton, and therefore unfit to discuss business matters, else I had something serious to say to you."

"That is, you have some bad news to communicate."

"I am sorry to say I have."

"Well, spare me it to-night, at all events. I beg your pardon, Holt, if I said anything offensive; but the fact is, I hardly know what I say. When I think of what this infernal election will cost me—close upon four thousand pounds."

"*What!*" exclaimed the other, in horrified accents.

"Not a penny less, upon my honour! I say, when I think of the money I have thus flung away for nothing, and *whose* money, I feel as though I

could blow my brains out—that is, if I have any brains, which, after such a piece of folly, may well be doubted. I felt ashamed, when I came back to-night, to look my own wife and children in the face.”

“Yet, you were doing what you thought the best you could for them.”

“No, I wasn’t,” answered the other, impetuously. “I was gambling with the money I had stolen from them, in hopes to get it back again; just as the shop-boy does who robs his master’s till; and then, to make restitution, goes to a betting-office and backs the loser.”

“Nay, nay; you stole nothing, and have robbed nobody, Dalton; so much, at least, you may comfort yourself with, under all circumstances. What you have done was, at worst, an error in judgment.”

“An error that will bring down those belonging to me, however,” went on the other, vehemently, “from competence, to what, by contrast, they will feel as poverty. What a dolt, what an idiot, I have been! To imagine that I was fitted to become a Leviathan of the City; that I could make a colossal fortune by mere wits and common honesty!”

“You have been honest enough, Dalton,” answered the other, drily; “and that, as I say, should always be a comfort to you.”

“Comfort! How can you talk such stuff as that, when I tell you what has happened. You have no ties, no responsibility of your own, or you could not do it. I tell you, when I have paid this Bampton bill, I shall have frittered away, from first to last, three-quarters of my fortune—nay of my children’s fortune. I don’t know what your bad news is, though I suppose it is more trouble about the Board; and if I lose my directorship—which with this *fasco* at Bampton, is more than likely—I have only one good horse left out of the whole string—the *Lara*. I snatched a look at the paper yesterday, and found the shares steadily rising. If that goes on, I may still recoup myself. I am bound to say you did show good judgment *there*, Holt.”

“To buy, and then to sell out; that is what I did.”

“I did not know you had sold out; but, at all events, you must have made a pretty penny.”

“Dalton,” said the other gravely, “my bad news is about the mine.”

“The mine!” exclaimed the other, starting from his seat, and turning deadly pale. “The *Lara*! You don’t mean to tell me that anything has happened to *that*?”

“I got this from my clerk this morning,” replied

Holt, producing one of the little notes, with the contents of which we are already acquainted, from his pocket. "Of course, things may not be so bad as they seem."

"Dalton snatched the slip of paper from his hand, and read aloud: "*Mem.—Brooks has cabled as follows: 'Sell Laras; whole concern a plant.'*"

"Brooks! Who is Brooks?"

"He is the local agent at St. José. The news is but too true, I fear. Brand is very careful."

"Good heavens! you talk as if I had but fifteen pounds at stake, instead of fifteen thousand. A plant? That means a swindle. Did you *know* it was a swindle, sir?"

"I will not answer such a question, Dalton. I can make every allowance for your excitement, but I will not submit to insult. I believed in the mine as much as you yourself did, up to six hours ago; and I had at one time almost as much money in it as you had. I always warned you to be content with a good premium, and to realise."

Dalton did not appear to hear him, but kept his gaze still fixed upon the memorandum, with its few fatal words. "*Sell Laras*. What does the man mean by that? How can I sell them when I know the scrip is but blank paper?"

"Just so; and especially when everybody else

knows it. But Brooks is Brazil bred, and has a Brazilian standard of commercial life. It is too late, of course, to do anything of the sort, even if you would. There have been other telegrams besides this man's. I read in the City article of *The Times*—it lay within your reach in the drawing-room to-night, and I trembled lest you should have cast your eye upon it—that the shares had become unquotable.”

“Fifteen thousand pounds,” groaned the unhappy Dalton; “and four thousand this week! Good heavens! they will have nothing to live upon—my poor, poor darlings!” It was strange to see how the loss had stricken him. The lines in his face seemed to have already deepened, and of the gay *debonnaire* expression that had so characterised his features, there was nothing left. Holt, too, was by no means unmoved. His face had paled, and if there was no pity in his eyes, that may have been through their incapacity of expression; his tones had pity in them as he replied: “They have a friend in *me*, Dalton, please to remember—if I may venture to say as much. Whatever I can do ——”

At this moment there was a knock at the billiard-room door, evidently administered with

the butt-end of a cue; and Mr. Campden's voice was heard bidding them good-night.

"I won't disturb your confab; but I'm off," he said, rather lugubriously, for the time had come when he must needs suffer avenging fires for the transgressions of the day.

Dalton waved his hand impatiently; and Holt, understanding the gesture, answered for him, "Good-night." He waited a little for his companion's acknowledgment of his offer of friendly aid, but since the other did not speak, he again addressed him: "What I wished to say to you, Dalton, is, that I am a rich man. I got 'a pretty penny,' as you have suggested, by selling out of the *Lara*, as I wish from my heart that you had done; and my purse was tolerably well-lined before. I beg to offer it—to any reasonable extent—at your disposal; to assist you, and those dear to you—— Nay, I mean no offence——"

"There is offence," exclaimed Dalton, vehemently. "Everything from you is an offence just now. One thing only you can do—this moment—for which I will thank you."

"Consider it as already done; what is it?"

"Leave me."

"Holt rose at once. "You will shake hands,

Dalton, at least. Though things have gone wrong with you it is not my fault."

Dalton neither moved nor spoke; but his eyes still fixed upon the crags without, looked fierce and hard.

"You will think better of this as regards myself to-morrow, old fellow; I make every allowance for your feeling sore with everybody at this moment, even with a true friend."

He threw a sharp glance round the room—the tables, the mantelpiece, the very book-shelves were all swept by it. "Thank goodness, there are no knives about," he murmured; then softly closed the door, and left the ruined man to his own thoughts.

CHAPTER IX.

WORMWOOD.

FOR many minutes after his companion had left the room, John Dalton sat in the same posture, his hands lying idly before him, and his mind busy with the past. He had been a fortunate man all his life—so his friends said; and up to within a year or two he had had no reason to disbelieve them. He had always had enough for his needs, and for the needs of those he loved, and these had not been of a simple kind. He had never been ostentatious, but he had mingled with the best society, without any outward sign of inferiority as regarded means, while in other respects he had stood high in it. His company had been always sought for, but not as that of a mere *raconteur* and dinner-wit, though he had the name of being such; he had been invited everywhere on equal terms. In such a circle he had had, of course, no reputation for wealth, but his cir-

cumstances had been more than easy; he had had no lack of servants and carriages; and if his home entertainments had not been upon so splendid a scale as that of most of his acquaintances, they had been sought after for their intrinsic goodness, as much as for the genial reputation of the host. Mrs. Dalton possessed tact, in addition to much better qualities; and though caring nothing for such matters herself, had looked after the little dinners in Cardigan Place with her own eyes, because she saw that her husband wished them to be perfect. She had been an “excellent manager”—but by no means in the sense used by the compilers of cheap cookery-books. She had taken care in the first place that things should be good—the best of their kind; and after that—but at a great distance—had made provision for economy. Her girls had been brought up sensibly, for the sphere in which they moved, but in a manner which by no means fitted them to endure poverty; and it was poverty—and worse than poverty, ruin—which their father had brought upon them. Of course he had not thought such a catastrophe possible when he had commenced his speculative career; he would not even have admitted that he was plunging into speculation; all had looked safe and smooth; nothing had seemed

to be wanting but a little happy audacity to place a man of his ability and connections in the very first rank of "business men." He had always despised the class so termed, finding them, as he generally did, so much slower, duller, and more ignorant—except upon one or two special subjects, such as a man of quick intelligence could master in a week—than himself; and his failure would have been galling to him, had there not been a score of other and more cogent reasons for his bitterness of spirit. As it was, the injury to his *amour propre* was not felt at all, in the agony of his deeper wounds. His pride—and John Dalton, though such "good company," and "hail fellow, well met" with all degrees of men and women, was a very proud man—was, indeed, humbled to the dust; but that was nothing in comparison with the humiliation he had wrought with those whom—to do him justice—he had ever loved better than himself. What would now become of his wife and children? was the question which beat importunately at the door of his brain, but which for the moment he was shutting out by reminiscences of the past, hardly less bitter. When and how was it, reflected he, that he had first been tempted to leave his former mode of life, and to embark upon this sea of troubles? As to who had been his tempter, he

had no doubt ; but where had he first encountered him ? It was at a dinner to which he had been invited by a bachelor friend—a Guardsman—at Greenwich. The company had been mostly younger than himself, as was often the case, for his wit and animal spirits recommended him to the young ; and the only one present who was his senior, or rather had appeared to be so, had been Richard Holt. This man, it was evident, was not of the same class as the rest ; and beyond a passing thought of how the deuce he got there, Dalton would probably not have troubled himself about him, but for a circumstance that took place after dinner. One of the guests, a young man of title, had drunk rather too freely, and over an argument, in which he was clearly in the wrong, with Holt, used some contemptuous expression, reflecting upon his calling as a stockbroker.

Holt behaved very well, putting much apparent restraint upon himself, for his host's sake ; and Dalton, always generous and impulsive, had taken up the cudgels for him, and silenced his assailant.

“You have made a friend of the best fellow in England to help you out of a scrape,” whispered his entertainer, when the party was breaking up ; but as Dalton was not in the habit of getting into the sort of difficulties to which he knew the other

alluded, he saw no reason to congratulate himself upon the alliance. However, during their drive home on the drag, it so happened that he found himself next the stranger, and a good deal of conversation took place between them. The topic, which Dalton himself had introduced in order to put the other at his ease, was commercial affairs, with which Holt showed himself thoroughly acquainted. He spoke of his own misfortune in having been all his life connected with them, which had produced his wealth, without the power of enjoying it in the way he desired. "I find myself cut off from society, except that of such young gentlemen as these," said he, "who make use of my services without permitting me to pretend to their friendship." He spoke with a certain mixture of pride and humility which prepossessed the other in his favour; while his references to City matters inflamed Dalton's ambition with that idea of "growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice," from which much better-balanced minds are not altogether free.

"With your manners and your connections, Mr. Dalton, success would indeed be easy," Holt had answered, when sounded on this point: "such an address as yours, if you will permit me to say so" (a favourite expression of his new friend's), "would

fetch a very high price east of Temple Bar ; we are cunning enough, but without the tact that at once persuades and conquers." The flattery was coarse, but, administered after a Greenwich dinner, on the top of a drag, it was not found fault with ; their acquaintanceship throve apace, and before they reached town, Dalton discovered—he never quite knew how—that a certain connection already existed between himself and his companion, which at once established confidential relations between them. This bond of union was that Philip Astor, Dalton's half-brother, of whom we have already spoken. That Astor was not a legitimate son of Dalton's father was now incontestable, for it had been so settled by the law ; but it was admitted even by the legitimate branch of the family that his case had been a hard one. He was by many years John Dalton's senior, and until his father's second marriage—which was in fact his first—had supposed himself to be his son and heir. Not till he was almost of age had he been made aware of his true position, and the discovery had acted fatally upon his character. He had become reckless and improvident ; and though a considerable pecuniary provision had been made for him, he had squandered all his means long before his father's death, which had

not taken place till John had himself arrived at man's estate. Then it was that Philip brought his lawsuit, and lost it; but so far from feeling bitter against his left-handed kinsman, John had offered to assist him from his own purse. The two brothers had met, and though the interview had been a stormy one, they had parted with less of ill-feeling than might have been expected. The one could only proffer as a gift what the other would only accept as a right; and so John's generosity came to nothing. But he had always entertained a kindly feeling for poor Philip, and had contrived, unknown to him, to procure him the means of livelihood as a merchant's clerk. This situation, however, upon discovering to whom he was indebted for it, Aston had thrown up, and down to that very night, John knew not what had become of him. To his great surprise, Holt now informed him that Philip had been employed in his office for some years.

Such had been the first introduction of the man of business to the man of fashion, and it had soon ripened into intimacy. As to Philip, he had doggedly refused, according to his present employer's account, to hold any intercourse with his half-brother; so no more was said about that matter. But Dalton and Holt did a good deal of

business together—or rather in concert. Whether the latter had inoculated the former with the love of speculation, or whether he originally had it in his blood, is doubtful, though Dalton was now ready to put all the blame upon his late ally; it is more probable that Dalton was eager, and that the other did but stimulate his wishes. But they had gone into a good many “likely things” together—doubtless by Holt’s advice—and for a little time matters had gone very well with them. In return for his assistance in this way, Holt had suggested rather than stipulated that his new friend should introduce him, upon as equal terms as might be, into society; and this Dalton had done. It was no small proof of his own social influence that he had brought Mr. Richard Holt into more than one exclusive circle, and kept him there, under what were certainly disadvantageous circumstances. The Campdens, though there was nothing absolutely vulgar about them, had nothing to boast of in the way of birth or breeding, nor was their position in the county so assured that they could afford to have a man like Holt living with them almost *en famille*; he would never have found himself at Riverside but for his friend’s good offices. In more than one case Dalton had had cause to lament the fate which had thus made him a sort of Siamese

twin of the prosperous stockbroker; for the slights that had been inflicted upon the latter, or which he had more often brought upon himself, he had in some degree shared; but his bitterest regret was that he had permitted this man to gain a footing in his own family. The thing had been unavoidable if he was to retain his alliance, but it had been done against the grain—so grudgingly that the other had scarcely thanked him for it—and it had turned out even worse than he had anticipated. Mrs. Dalton was a woman always ready to welcome her husband's friends, and make them, so far as was possible, her own. His social success owed more to her tact in this respect than perhaps he would have been ready to allow; but she could not welcome this man, who was *not* his friend, but only his business ally. She had disliked him before she saw him, as the person who had seduced her husband from his former pursuits—if such they could be called; had persuaded him to exchange his *rôle* as a charmer of society, but one who, nevertheless, spent much of his time at home, for what she would have called in another a sordid ambition. She did not want him to get more money, and certainly not by associating with companions such as this man, whose manners and appearance were to her mind, though she did not speak her

mind, by no means the worst of him. Kate did not like him, it was plain, and still less Jenny—Jenny, the invalid, who, though so fragile of frame, had so keen an eye and sharp a tongue; and yet, with all these members of his family, as it seemed to Dalton, this fellow had affected a certain intimacy.

When he had talked just now of “those dear to him,” and had offered to be their friend, as though it were a favour on his part, he had felt inclined to knock him down. And yet, in truth, it had become necessary that somebody should befriend them. He himself was a hopelessly ruined man, while Holt was, by his own confession, very rich. He could not say that he had become so at his expense; nor, indeed, had his own losses, so far as he knew, been of the least advantage to the other; but, somehow, he felt as though he had been the man’s cat’s-paw. As to the *Lara*, the speculation had been brought under his notice—like all the rest—by Holt, but in a more private sort of way; it was a pet investment of Holt’s own, and at one time they had possessed nearly the whole mine between them. Then, as the shares rose, Holt had, it seemed, sold out—as, indeed, he had advised Dalton to do—while he had held on; and the end was that the one had come out of it all safe, and with a

large sum in pocket, while the other had lost his all, and more than his all; for Dalton had not only lost his own money, but that of his wife, which, by her own wish, and from her unbounded confidence in him, had not been settled upon her at their marriage. His shame and horror were so great, that for the moment he had not dared to look that part of the matter in the face, but had forced his thoughts, as we have said, to travel back over that fatal part of his life's journey on which Richard Holt had first become his companion. He had felt of late months that companionship growing more and more distasteful to him, but at the same time more indispensable; he distrusted him in his heart, though, as reason told him, without any justification for such a feeling. He had begun to hate the man because he thought he saw he had had the audacity to look even beyond his friendship; and though up to that night he had been able to regard his pretensions with grim contempt, he could not do so now. It was that reflection which had, in fact, made him so rude to Holt at parting an hour or so ago—for so long had he been chewing the bitter cud of memory—and which now made the man so loathsome to him. And yet his mind preferred to dwell upon him, and his relations

with himself, rather than upon his own ruin, and the effects that must necessarily result from it. For what was underlying all his thoughts, and tincturing their sadness with a bitterness far beyond that of the waters of death, was the consciousness that when he left that room it must needs be to seek the presence of his wife, to tell that dear one of the blow which had hurled her and hers from wealth to poverty, and that it was his own hand that had inflicted it.

How cold and cruel, in her stately beauty, Nature looked that night! how unmoved by the agony of his soul! How peacefully slept the moonbeams on the crags, as though to the lullaby of the river's song! If he shot himself, or cut his throat, she would still smile on. If he shot himself! The thought recurred to him with a terrible impetuosity, before which all mere sentimental reflections vanished. Would it not be better to put a bullet through his brain, and have done with life, the sweets of which had been squeezed out, and nothing left but the bitter rind? He could do no good to his wife and children by living on, for he could never be their bread-winner. How could he—*he* who had done nothing from his youth up but fare of the best, without toil of brain or muscle—he who had paid

nothing but a light jest or two for his place in the world—hope to support these helpless ones, being himself so helpless? Nay, he would be a burden on them, rather, for a woman and children might find shelter which could not for very shame be accepted by a man like him. In all respects it would be better for them that he should die. As for the sin of it, and his own punishment hereafter, it did not at that moment enter into his calculations; if he thought of himself at all, it was to reflect that if he killed himself then and there, he should be spared the interview which was awaiting him below-stairs. He threw a glance round the room, just as Holt had done upon leaving it; but it fell upon nothing in the way of weapon, unless a gilt paper-knife, with a tiger's tooth for handle, could be called so, with which he remembered, with strange distinctness, cutting "Blackwood" the last time he had visited Riverside in the spring. The magazine had contained some forecast of the coming general election, and amongst other places had mentioned Bampton as wavering in its allegiance, and likely, though after many years of fidelity, to return a Liberal candidate. The vacancy in the borough had taken place through the death of its representative—the constituencies in general not having as yet been

appealed to; but the apprehension expressed by the reviewer had proved groundless, to his cost. How Campden and himself had smiled over it at the time, and how confident he had been of the contrary issue—for Bampton had even then been in his eye, although vaguely—and how valueless and utterly uninteresting the whole subject had now become! If he had been a Member of Parliament even, instead of a rejected candidate, it would have availed him nothing, but only have made his fall the greater. It was not probable, thought he grimly, that any difference would be made in the manner of his reception in the next world, from his having been chosen by the electors of Bampton or not. A tiger's tooth! It was not by a bite, as he had read, that the tiger killed his man, but by one blow of his mighty paw. That must be an easy death to die; but the method was exceptional, and not within his reach. He took from his pocket a little pen-knife; its handle was of tortoiseshell, inlaid with silver, and upon it was a date engraved. Jenny had given it to him upon his birthday, years ago, when she was quite a child, ailing in health, indeed, but before her disease had declared itself. "It will not cut *our* love, dear papa," she had said, alluding to the proverb and her present. His hand trembled

for a moment, and he felt that sting in his eyelids which is the precursor of the bitterest tears, but no tears fell. Since he loved her so much, it was the more necessary that he should do the best he could to smooth her life-path; and the best he could do was to die. That he honestly believed, for he was probably unaware how forcibly his own personal misery was impelling him to such a course. The blade was as keen as a razor, and had a sharp point. If he had been a doctor, or had had any scientific knowledge—whereas, thought he, bitterly, “I know nothing”—he would have known exactly where to strike, and all would have been over in a moment. He had read about “the jugular vein,” but he could not work up his mind to cut his throat; he was not afraid to do so, but the idea shocked his fastidiousness. “What a fuss that woman would make about her carpet!” was a reflection, too, that characteristically crossed his mind. He remembered to have seen a surgeon of his acquaintance indicate the exact spot in the left side where even the thrust of a needle would cause instant death; if that was the case, surely a knife like this—— Here a circumstance occurred which disturbed him beyond measure. He heard the door behind him open and shut, and felt that he was not alone. Was it possible that his wife,

alarmed by his prolonged absence, and knowing that the others had long since retired, had come up to look after him? His face grew damp, and, the night air blowing cold upon it, he began to shiver; his hand became so unsteady that he could scarcely hold the knife, with which he now pretended to be paring his nails.

"I hope I have not disturbed you, Mr. Dalton?" said a cheerful voice.

"Thank heaven! it is only Derwent," muttered the wretched man.

"I came up for a book that I had forgotten," continued the young fellow, "and had no idea that you were still here. Your cigar is out; shall I give you a light?"

"No, Jeff, thank you."

There was something of sadness in the tone, that struck the lad's keen ear.

"Can I do *nothing* for you? You are not ill, I hope?"

"Not I, my boy; only a little down in the mouth, from being the rejected of Bampton. If you had had a vote, you would have plumped for me, would you not?"

"Indeed, Mr. Dalton, I would plump for you for everything!"

The genuineness of the young fellow's speech,

and its simplicity, were such as a man like Dalton could not fail to feel, even in his present condition.

"I have no doubt of that, Jeff," he replied, kindly. "You and I have always been good friends."

"But the goodness was on your side," answered the boy, gravely. "It is to no one's advantage in this house to be a friend of mine. It is everybody's advantage to be a friend of yours."

Dalton laughed so mockingly, that the other paused in wonder, and when he continued, his voice had a still more earnest gravity. It was evident that he saw something was very wrong.

"I am so powerless, Mr. Dalton ; but if the most I can do can be of the least service to you or yours, you will not forget to make use of me. I have thews and sinews—but that is all, I am afraid."

"And wind, Jeff—excellent wind, if what Tony was telling me to-night was true. You got into trouble about it, I hear, but you won the Guide Race."

"Yes ; I came in first, though it was almost by a fluke. If I had not gone at the brook, I should have been beaten. Here is the belt." And the lad exhibited that token of his prowess—which vanity had caused him to buckle round his waist, a broad

leathern strap with a silver clasp—with conscious pride.

“And did you get a prize in the wrestling-ring also? Were you Hercules as well as Hippomenes?”

“No: Mr. Holt said he thought that it would be considered ‘unseemly’—he *meant*, I suppose, caddish—and yet I almost thought that Tony would have persuaded him to try a fall himself. He will do anything for Tony, or for the girls, or for Mrs. Dalton—that I will say for him.”

“What a pity he did not wrestle,” observed Dalton, grimly. “They might have given him a cropper, some of them, big as he is.”

“Yes, indeed; but he laughed it off by telling Tony that he couldn’t do it because his life was not insured; though of course he never meant to. I suppose I must thank him for sticking up for me to-night, and saying that it was by his advice I entered for the Guide Race; though it was not true; and he only said it to please Kitty.”

At any other time that suggestion would have excited Dalton’s wrath; but he had not heard the boy’s last words. A sentence that had just before dropped from his lips quite accidentally was ringing in his ears, and made him unconscious of the rest.

“Well, well, Jeff, we must not talk any more

to-night, or Mrs. Campden will be accusing me of teaching you more bad habits—sitting up till the small hours, for one thing. Good-night, my lad.”

“Good-night, Mr. Dalton.” As the boy withdrew, he noticed how his companion’s face fell forward on his hands, and felt that he was in sore trouble. It was so strange to see the man whom he had always known so light and gay, in this sad case, that he was loath to leave him, even at his own request. Yet he felt he had no choice. He could not cure his grief, whatever it might be, or even soothe it, being, as he had said, so powerless. He never knew that—powerless though he was—his entrance into that room had saved a fellow-creature from self-destruction. The words he had quoted from Holt’s mouth, “Because my life is not insured,” had reminded Dalton, who in his agony of regret and shame had clean forgotten the fact, that his own life was insured, and that the policy would be made void by his suicide.

There was no escape left for him in his wretchedness, even in death itself.

CHAPTER X.

A TRUE WIFE.

WHEN we poor sons of men are miserable, we are prone to think that we have reached a depth of distress beyond that which the experience of others has sounded, and approaching the very limit—and even exceeding it, since in despair we often seek refuge in the grave—which human nature can bear. The gentleman who has just been black-balled at the long-desired club; the lady to whom the Lord Chamberlain has refused permission to present herself at Her Majesty's Drawing-room; the business man who finds himself unable to meet his engagements on the morrow; the wife who has just discovered the unfaithfulness of her husband: all these, although suffering such different degrees of woe, imagine that not in the condemned cell of Newgate itself is to be found a mortal so utterly forsaken by the gods as they. It is the poor privilege of the wretched to exaggerate their calamities,

and perhaps John Dalton indulged himself in this way like the rest. Yet it is difficult to imagine that that autumn morning dawned upon a human creature more wholly miserable than he, as he crept down the thick carpeted stairs and along the painted corridors of Riverside to his own room. Everything about him breathed of wealth and luxury, while every thought within him pictured ruin. Hour after hour he had sat alone, till the cold gray light had broken over the crags of Bleabarrow, but not one ray of comfort had fallen upon him ; he had racked his brain for a single gleam of hope wherewith to mitigate the gloom of that confession which he must now needs make to his unsuspecting wife, and had found none. He had prayed, and his prayer had come back to him, as it seemed, rejected. There are agonies in which the impatient soul demands some visible sign of God's good providence, and being denied it, it dares to question His existence. There was no help for him, he cried in his exceeding bitterness, in God or man. As for himself, he was ready to own that he did not deserve such help ; and if he had stood alone in the world, he would have taken his punishment, doggedly perhaps, but without repining or complaint. He was no coward, though in that dark hour (as generally happens) his very

vivacity of spirits, quickened by long years of prosperity and success, showed his seamy side, and made him proportionably prone to despondency; but his apprehensions for the fate of those he loved, and whom his folly had dragged down to the dust, were overwhelming.

His delicate and devoted wife; Kitty, with her beauty and expectations; Jenny, prostrated by her illness, and for whom until now everything had been done to prevent even the winds of heaven from visiting her too roughly; little Tony, with his education but just begun, and looking forward to being an Eton boy: each of these pictures, to gaze on which had hitherto been the pride of his life, was now become to him terrible to look upon; and yet, alas, they were living realities. The prospect was not to be evaded or shut out; not one of these beloved portraits could he turn with its face to the wall.

As he drew near his dressing-room, his step fell more lightly on the carpet, and he turned the handle of the door very softly, lest his wife, who slept in the next apartment, should be disturbed. His intention was on no account to waken her, but to suffer her to sleep on until near her usual hour for being called, when he must needs tell her his ill news. It would be the last sleep free from care

that she would ever have ; and as for him, there was small chance of his losing consciousness of his woes even for a moment. To his surprise, however, on entering his dressing-room, the window-curtains of which were of course closed, excluding the dawn, he perceived a strong light under the door that communicated with the next apartment. At the same moment he heard his name called in those dear accents the sound of which had hitherto been ever as music to his ear. Now, they only evoked a shudder. Without trusting himself to answer, for he was sensible that he had lost control over his own tones, he summoned up a smile, and opened the door. To his great distress, he found Mrs. Dalton had not retired to her couch, but was sitting in her dressing-gown, awaiting him—as she had doubtless been for the last six hours.

“My dearest love, how can you be so imprudent?”

He was careful for her health at all times, and there was an especial reason for her taking care of it for the next few months to come ; for the moment, he only thought of that, and not of the sad burden of woe which he had come to share with her.

“I could not sleep, dear,” said she, tenderly, “until I had seen you, and heard from

your own lips what it was that has troubled you so."

Here, as it might seem, was his opportunity of gently breaking to her his terrible news; but no sooner did it present itself than his courage failed him. What hurry was there, after all, to introduce this innocent and unsuspecting creature to irreparable calamity? He had made up his mind, indeed, to do so that very morning, but it now struck him that there was no need for such great haste as that. The blow, indeed, must fall; but it would not do so immediately, and it was his duty to prepare her for it by gradations. Any sudden shock to one in her delicate situation might have a serious effect, and was to be avoided. Though death was sweet to himself, because of the evil that he had wrought her, he shrank from contemplating it—miserable though her life might be—in connection with *her*.

"My darling, you alarm me beyond measure: to lose your natural rest is to do yourself, just now, a serious injury. My news, whatever it be, might surely wait for the morning."

"I must know what it is, John—I must, indeed," pleaded she; and she rose from her chair, and placing a thin white hand upon each of his shoulders, looked straight into his eyes. "Do not tell me it was the election only. Have I known

and loved you all these years not to know better than that? Thank God, you are well!—in health at least—and the children are well. If I had not had them under my own eye to-night, I should have thought, when I looked upon your face, that there was something amiss with *them*. What else, John, can have happened to so change you?”

“To change me, Edith? I flattered myself my manner was much the same to-night as usual. But it is quite true that something has happened to trouble me.”

“Then it is a mere money trouble?”

“It *is* a money trouble, but a very severe one.”

“Thank God, thank God, it is no worse!” said Mrs. Dalton, fervently. “That nothing of blame or shame could be laid to *your* door, I knew; but I was apprehensive—I always have been—that your connection with Mr. Holt might lead you into some painful position. Your reference to him in your letter of this morning made me uneasy. None of us like the man; we are only women, moved by instinct, and not by reason; but since such a feeling was common to all three of us——”

“There seemed something in it—eh, my darling?” observed Dalton, finishing the uncompleted sentence. He found his task much easier now than he could have hoped for. What his wife had

said was strangely consonant with his own recent thoughts. He knew that Holt was no favourite with her or with the girls, but he had no idea that they entertained any such suspicions of him—unreasonable, as she herself had said, yet suspicions which he shared. In her case, however, he did not wish that they should be corroborated; it was better she should feel he had been ruined by his own folly than another's fraud, even if there had been fraud.

"I know nothing against Holt's honesty, my dear," continued he, gravely. "But I did not wish you to speak to him about the election, lest you should have heard something from his lips which should be told only by my own. It was most essential to me, as I thought when I wrote that note, to succeed at Bampton; my credit—by which I mean my commercial importance—would have been seriously affected by the result; but now all that has sunk into insignificance in the presence of an overwhelming calamity."

"You have lost your fortune, John!" Her tone was grave, but very soft and gentle, and there was a smile of content upon her face, very strange to see at such a time.

"Yes, dear, I have—God help me!—every far-thing of it."

"But you have not lost us, John; I am still with you"—her voice trembled a little, but she went bravely on—"and the dear children."

"Yes, darling; it is on your account and theirs—not on mine, God knows—that this has unnerved me; that the burden seems more heavy than I can bear."

"Then let us help you to carry it; what is heavy for one is light for four. The girls are old enough, and wise enough, to bear their part. What is the loss of money when love is left!"

"Edith, Edith! you know not what you say; you have not pictured to yourself what ruin is. Did you not hear me say that I have lost my all?—and, Heaven forgive me, *your* all also!"

She sank down in the chair, for her limbs had failed her, still retaining his hand within her own. "I did not understand," said she, in a faint voice; "God help us!"

"Even she, devoted as she is, cannot image to herself," thought he, "my fatal folly, and forgive it; such a baseness as I have committed is inconceivable to her innocent and unselfish nature; I am condemned by the sole judge to whom I could have looked for mercy." How wrong he was, how little he knew her, notwithstanding that he loved her so! When we stand before the judgment-seat

of Heaven itself we may know—I trust we shall—a diviner pity, but here on earth there is no such unstinting fount of pity and forgiveness as the heart of woman.

“Pardon me, dear John,” were her first broken words; “the weakness has passed now, and I feel as befits your wife. Yes; and I would not change my place to-night, this moment,” taking his head within her hands, for he had cast himself upon his knees at her feet, and hidden his face in an agony of remorse and shame, “with that of any woman in this world, no matter how rich—how prosperous! And I love you, John, better in your poverty and your ruin than I have ever loved you yet; and I will be true to you, and be your help—as help may be in me—and so will Kate and Jenny.”

Then she broke down. She could have borne all herself, but the thought of her children, and what they would have to bear, was too much for her mother’s heart. Husband and wife mingled their tears together—bitter tears of self-condemnation in the one case, and of tenderness and pity in the other. “Hush!” said she—for a man’s grief who has not shed a tear since childhood is always loud—“Jenny is a light sleeper,” and she pointed to the door that led into the room of the invalid. “Now tell me all about it, John; I can bear to

hear it much better than I can bear to wait. I know the worst; how can it hurt me, then, to know the shape in which it has come! Nay, it is idle to talk of rest, of sleep; I pray you tell me."

So, sitting hand in hand, John Dalton told her all, omitting only his suspicions concerning Holt.

She listened attentively—asking a question calmly here and there, when she required some matter of business to be explained—to the bitter end.

"Then if the bad news about the mine should not be confirmed," said she, "our affairs would not be so desperate?"

"They are already confirmed, Edith; do not, I beseech you, indulge in any hope on that head. The mine was a swindle from the beginning."

"Yet Mr. Holt persuaded you to invest in it?"

"Certainly; he thought it a genuine thing and a very good thing; he purchased largely in it himself; that I know of my own personal knowledge.

"And yet he sold them afterwards?"

"Yes; but at a high premium. If I had followed his advice, I am bound to say I should have made money by it. I had taken—I don't know why, unless it was from what he had originally told me—a fatal fancy to the investment."

“And to whom did Mr. Holt sell his shares?”

“I don’t know ; it was doubtless done through a broker, and he may not even know himself. Why do you ask that question?”

“From ignorance, my dear. I understand no more of such matters than our little Tony.”

“Poor boy!” sighed Dalton, despondently. The mention of his son brought keenly to his mind that sense of ruin which this discussion about the *Lara* had for the moment diverted from it.

“Well, darling, we must look about us,” said Mrs. Dalton, cheerfully, “and plan what is to be done. A man of your talents, who has got so many influential friends, need not, surely, long remain without some lucrative employment.”

John Dalton had had some experience of place-hunting, though not upon his own account, and he knew that in that description of sport the “blank days” were many, and that those even of the most skilful huntsmen who “find” at all are few. The humiliation of beggary would be terrible to him, and how often would he have to beg and be refused.

“There are the Skiptons, you know, darling ; they have always been such friends of ours, and Sir William, who is in the Ministry, would surely exert himself for your sake.”

Her husband shook his head, as though he did not entertain much hope of assistance from that quarter. Sir William, although he was the Attorney-general, was a dull man, and Dalton had more than once expressed his opinion to that effect—of course in the politest possible manner—when they chanced to differ. Their families were very intimate, but the men themselves were as opposite as the poles, and had no very high opinion of one another. Twenty-four hours ago, it would have seemed as impossible to Dalton to have asked a favour of Sir William Skipton as to pick his pocket; he would not have done it had he been starving. But the question now was whether he could bring himself to do it, to provide bread for his children.

“Then there is Cousin Tatham, John; I am sure he has always expressed the highest admiration of your talents.”

Poor Dalton winced at this. Lord Tatham, a distant relative of his wife, was a venerable nobleman who enjoyed a certain insignificant appointment about the Court; and though, from his appearance of wisdom and gravity, he might have sat upon the woolsack to represent the Lord Chancellor in his absence, he was, in fact, a nonentity; a mere stuffed personage with a bag-

wig and sword. He was, it is true, always talking about his patronage, but it was only the appointment of the royal footmen that lay within his gift.

While Mrs. Dalton thus imagined to herself that the Court and the Ministry would both be interested in her husband's favour, he himself was rapidly reviewing in his own mind all the really possible chances that were open to him, and they seemed few indeed. He had friends, it is true, upon whom he could rely for sympathy, and even, perhaps, for material aid—though in a shape which, even now, he could not conceive himself capable of accepting—but they were men of his own style and character, genial, agreeable fellows, and who had, with few exceptions, never sought to burden themselves with the duties, and therefore the privileges of office. He felt that they could have nothing to give him in the way of employment. He had a slight acquaintance, indeed, with a Minister or two beside Sir William, but he had always attached himself to the other faction in politics, and it was unreasonable to expect that his late attempt upon the virtue of the borough of Bampton, though it had failed, would recommend him to their good offices.

Nothing very practical, indeed, came out of the

long discussion that took place that weary morning, concerning future ways and means, between husband and wife, yet Dalton found an unexpected solace in it.

He had never before taken Edith into his confidence upon the state of his affairs; and her sagacity and common-sense, wherever her knowledge of the grounds upon which to build was equal to his own, surprised him. We do not give the angels such credit for aptitude for worldly wisdom as perhaps they deserve. Mrs. Dalton's views were doubtless sanguine; she had much more confidence not only in her husband's friends, but in his own abilities, than he had himself; but if sympathy is not help, it is next akin to it, and hope begets hope; and before their talk was over, Dalton was certainly in a less despairing mood than he had been some hours ago.

Though his wife had suggested much, she had stipulated but one thing—namely, that their misfortune should, if possible, be kept from the knowledge of their children until their return to their own home. “Let them enjoy themselves for the few days that remain of our visit here, John; it will be easier to break this news when we are all together under our own roof; nor do I wish, unless you see any good reason to the contrary,

that our host and hostess should learn what has befallen us, while we remain their guests.”

It was out of the true mother's heart, we may be sure, that the first advice was given; but of the source of the second I am not so certain—perhaps it was a little womanly pride. Her connection with the Campdens had always been on equal terms, and she shrank, though the change must needs come sooner or later, from its being placed on another footing. Or, perhaps, she thought that Julia would not prove the most sympathising of friends at such a crisis.

To both conditions Dalton would have willingly assented, but he feigned objections in order to gain compliance, by giving way, with a stipulation of his own—namely, that Edith should retire to rest for the little time that now intervened before her usual hour for being called. To this she was with difficulty persuaded, and presently, worn out with watching, and weariness and woe, she fell asleep.

As the daylight struggled in, and lit up her delicate wan face, as it lay beside his own, a new fear crept into his aching heart, and mingled with its other tenants. Suppose that his faithful and beloved companion should perish in her coming trial, and leave him *alone* in the dark days to come! The thought was agonising, but

only in consonance with those which already beset him. That worst, at which, when we have arrived, it is said that "things must mend," he felt was limitless in evil. There are times when poor humanity rejects the smooth prophecy, "Heaven will never desert me so utterly as to suffer this to happen or that;" but, with sickening fear, expects the utmost cruelty of Fate.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. HOLT'S ADVICE.

WHEN we lose one very dear to us, by death, the agony culminates at once; there is nothing more dreadful to be felt than it—it will break out again and again with intense severity, but always with a less violence than in the black hour of bereavement, and a day comes, sooner or later, when our friends—the best of whom do not know us half so well as we know ourselves—remark to one another: “He has got over it.” The effect of a great stroke of ill-luck—of a very heavy pecuniary misfortune, for example—is generally quite different. The blow prostrates us for the moment, but almost directly afterwards vitality asserts itself; we are revived by a host of hopes, each insignificant in itself, and which, since they cannot coalesce, have really no practical value; but they inspire courage. A drowning man is said to catch at a straw, and ten thousand straws floating about him would

doubtless proportionably excite his hope, though they would be of no more help than one, unless they could be formed into a straw *rick*. And thus it was with John Dalton, when he woke—for “merciful nature” had given him nearly an hour’s forgetfulness—to find himself, for the first time, a ruined man. We say “for the first time,” because many respectable persons are ruined many times, and to them the picture I have painted of this man’s wretchedness will doubtless have appeared too highly coloured. Nay, they will assert, “Not even at first did we give way in such a miserable manner.” Very likely, my friends. Are you quite sure that you really lost anything? Had you anything of your own to begin with? And did you not go into that particular line of business which proved so unfortunate with this catastrophe already more or less before your eyes? Now, John Dalton could scarcely have been more astonished at what had befallen him had he suddenly found himself changed into a bird or a beast.

He had left his own line in life, and entered into “commercial enterprise,” it is true, with no higher aim than his own butler, who would doubtless now take a public-house with the money saved in his own service, namely, “to better himself ;” but he

had had no idea of risking his all upon the result; and the shock—now he found that he had lost his all—was by consequence the greater. Still, as we have said, the clouds seemed to lift a little that morning. He was able to put in a cheerful appearance at the breakfast-table; nor throughout that day, except that he at times appeared pre-occupied, could you have guessed the load of care he bore upon his shoulders. The *Pall Mall* confirmed the news of the previous morning, however—another commercial collapse, though, fortunately, it was understood to affect only a limited circle, had taken place in the case of the *Lara* mine; it had been egregiously puffed, but had now gone the way of most mines; the expert sent out by the committee of English shareholders had “cabled” news that the speculation was next door to worthless; that the proceeds of the mine would not even pay for its working. The shares, which but the other day had been at a high premium, were now unquotable. The fifteen thousand pounds which Dalton had invested in it, and which represented about half the value of the English shares, were irrevocably gone.

Convinced of this, he did not lose a post in privately communicating with such friends as he thought might have the power to serve him. He

was frank with them, and yet concise. "I have lost all my money, and urgently require some employment—the more lucrative the better," was the burden of each note. After despatching them he felt relieved, as a man will do who has done his best to help himself.

"From so large a principal of good-will," thought he, "I shall surely get a sufficient return of interest for my needs." Nor did he in this calculation overestimate his popularity; almost everybody liked John Dalton, and would have done him a good turn if they could.

At dinner he was exceedingly amusing, and excited Mrs. Campden's indignation by a spirited defence of the Indian system of suttee. The chief objection to death, in the case of comparatively young persons, he argued, was that no dear ones have preceded them into the dark and silent land; whereas the old may flatter themselves with the idea of rejoining their kinsfolk and acquaintances. Thus, although it might be a little selfish in His Highness, nothing was more natural than that an Indian prince, finding himself on the point of departure from this world, should require his favourite wives and servants to accompany him upon his journey to the other, where it was only too probable that he would

not find persons to understand his little ways, and make him comfortable.

"I call it most abominably wicked," said Mrs. Campden.

"Doubtless it is, my dear madam ; I only said it was natural, which, indeed, corroborates the view of the Church of England upon original sin."

Mrs. Campden did not quite understand this logic, but she had a strong suspicion that her guest was joking—a thing which in itself she detested—and, what was worse, that he was joking at her own expense. She showed considerable annoyance; nor could Mrs. Dalton avoid casting a reproachful glance at her husband. "Is this a time," it seemed to say, "to give offence to friends, when it is so necessary to rally them round us?" But the fact was that it was the very consciousness of that necessity which tempted Dalton to show his independence, by carrying to some extremity that guerilla warfare which had always existed between his hostess and himself.

Mrs. Campden had her revenge, if she had only known it; for she was very loquacious about certain plans for the future, in which Mrs. Dalton and her daughters had their share, with respect to her next visit to London. Mary, as had been arranged, was to stay with the girls in Cardigan

place for some weeks, during which all sorts of gaieties were to be enjoyed ; and then Mr. and Mrs. Campden were themselves to come up to town, and exchange their present position as host and hostess for that of guests. In all these projects the wherewithal was, of course, taken for granted and as a matter of course ; and it cut Dalton to the heart to hear the eagerness with which his daughters entered into them. In a few weeks' time, as he bitterly reflected, there would be no home, even for themselves, far less to offer to others.

His position during this unhappy day was, however, a less painful one than that of his wife ; for she could not escape without attracting notice from the society of those dear ones whose unconscious gaiety inflicted upon her a thousand stabs, while her husband could seek solitude or the companionship of those comparatively indifferent to him, under pretence of transacting business. Indeed, he found some relief from his pressing anxieties in conversation with Holt himself, notwithstanding the unfavourable light in which he had begun to regard him. The man had a clear head for affairs, and was able to place his position and obligations before him with a greater definiteness than lay in his own power.

It is something to know where you are, however

uncomfortable may be your predicament; and with this information Dalton was by this means supplied. If he was "sold up to-morrow," there would be three thousand pounds left for the support of his wife and family! a sum which had hitherto about represented his annual income.

"So you can live a whole year, my good fellow, as you have been accustomed to do," said Holt, cheerfully; "and, in the meantime, the deuce is in it, if, with such influential friends as you possess, some post is not offered you."

There were three things in this speech that annoyed Dalton excessively.

In the first place, he did not like the familiarity of it—the phrase "my good fellow" had not often been in Holt's mouth, even if he had ever before used it; it seemed to him that the man was taking liberties with him because of his downfall. Secondly, he thought he detected a sneer in the tone in which his "influential friends" were mentioned. It had been the object of Holt's ambition to be introduced to these friends, but their acquaintance could scarcely have been satisfactory to him, and it seemed probable that he meant to imply that they were broken reeds to lean upon, taking it for granted that they would be no more sympathetic with Dalton than they had been to

himself. Thirdly, and most of all, he was irritated at the man's supposing he could be so madly selfish as to continue the same course of life, under his changed circumstances, as he had hitherto done. Nevertheless, he restrained his passion.

"You must take me for a very phlegmatic fellow, Holt—not to say a knave and a fool—to suppose I could *enjoy* such a year of prosperity as you suggest."

"Indeed, I meant no offence. I have known many a man, in a worse pickle than you, go on precisely the same way as though he had not lost a shilling; and in the end, none but myself and one or two more ever knew that he *had* lost one. With a year to turn about in——"

"Don't talk such sheer nonsense!" interrupted Dalton, impatiently. "Such a phrase may mean something with your City friends, who have always got some scheme or another of enriching themselves at the expense of the public; but as addressed to me, you must know it is mere moonshine."

"Live on fifteen hundred, then, for double the time. Surely in two years——"

"No!" broke in the other. "I am not likely to act a lie any more, I hope, than to tell one. I shall make no secret to any one, after I have left this house, of the ruin that has befallen me."

"You will do as you please, Dalton, of course ; but I see no reason why you should cry stinking fish. Nobody likes a man the better, or feels more inclined to help him, because he is poor ; and then there is your family to be considered."

"Sir !" cried Dalton, sternly, "I beg you will confine your observations to those affairs in which I have asked your advice. My wife and children will be guided by my own judgment in this matter, and by it alone."

Mr. Holt shrugged his shoulders, and threw his hands up (in the style that he believed to be continental) with an air so peculiarly vulgar, that it would have aroused Dalton's disgust under any circumstances ; as it was he felt his contempt for this man fast changing into a consuming hate. "It is impossible to discuss this question, Dalton, if, in every suggestion of mine, you are determined to find some ground of quarrel. In my humble opinion, to inform the world of your ruin is to make that ruin certain. Men put water into a pump to make it draw ; but if they know there is nothing in the well, they spare their labour. Except in the way of charity, no moneyed man will help you if you begin by acknowledging yourself bankrupt."

"And who told you, sir, that I was going to

ask any man for his money?" The tone and manner of Dalton were so threatening that Holt, who had recommenced his continental shrug, desisted from it half-way; his shoulders went up but did not come down again, so that he remained like the famous jumping frog, who could not start by reason of the small-shot in his inside.

"I did not mean that you were going to beg, of course; but money or credit may certainly be very necessary for you, and that at once, supposing there is bad news from Brazil."

"Bad news from Brazil! Do you mean as respects the *Lara*? Why, we have had such bad news already, that I don't see how it can be worse. I take it for granted that the shares must be paid up in full, and are worthless, and that all my fifteen thousand pounds are gone."

"That is certain. But is it possible you have forgotten the fact that the liability is unlimited?"

The conversation we have been describing took place in the library at Riverside—a magnificent room, so contrived that to those within it there appeared no door at all, all the walls being lined from floor to ceiling with splendidly-bound books. These gorgeous volumes, all gilt and colour, as well as the three large windows on which the afternoon sun was shining, now began to revolve before the

unhappy Dalton's eyes ; the world spun round with him, and that so fast, that it seemed he had no breath to reply to his companion's words.

"You *did* know that they were unlimited, of course?" continued the other, after a long pause.

"I did; but you told me—you yourself—that they were only nominally so; that the operations of the mine were on a comparatively small scale, and that we should never be required to pay up the shares in full, much less to become liable for more."

"I daresay I did, my good fellow; but then I was deceived, like yourself. How could I know that the speculation would turn out to be so disastrous?"

"You mean that you did not know it was a swindle?"

"Well, a swindle is a harsh term."

"It is the name, you have read, which the expert sent out by the committee has given to the whole concern: he says there is no gold worth speaking of, and that an attempt was made to 'salt' the mine, in order to deceive him. In my opinion, to call men rogues who are capable of such a plot as that, is to pay them a compliment. They are unmitigated cheats and scoundrels, who deserve to be laid by their heels in jail, and

would be likely to contaminate those they found there."

"My good friend, one must take matters as one finds them. If I could have foreseen that the promoters of the enterprise were such as you describe, you may be sure I should not have invested my own money in it, even for a day. It is no use crying over spilt milk; let us look at the matter like practical men. It is quite possible that the paid-up shares may cover all expenses; but, on the other hand, they may not; in which case it will be necessary that your friends should stand by you. I beg, my dear Dalton, that you will consider me as one of them, and certainly not the least interested in your welfare. I will myself be responsible for any liability you may incur in the *Lara*, over and above the amount of the shares. If you doubt the genuineness of my offer, let me put it on paper."

"You are very good, I am sure," returned Dalton, keeping his eyes fixed upon the carpet, and speaking as if every word was dragged from him by force. "Your word is quite a sufficient guarantee of your wish to serve me."

Whatever happened, he was resolutely determined that he would never lay himself under an obligation to this man.

“Good? Not at all, my dear fellow,” replied the other, cheerfully; “it is in such circumstances as the present that a friend should show himself friendly. There is many a one who will lend you money, I don’t doubt; but come to me first, I beg of you. As to security, be sure I shall never look for it; and as to interest, I hope I may be allowed to say that another sort of interest, which I feel in the well-being of you and yours, will more than repay me for either risk or loss.”

“You are very good,” repeated Dalton, mechanically.

It was not a hearty acknowledgment, far less an eager acceptance of his offer; but Holt seemed well content with it; perhaps he felt that it was something that he had been allowed to say “you and yours” without awakening the passionate resentment that he had aroused the previous night. If the gain was a small one, it had at least been made in a short time.

“We shall not know about this precious mine, I suppose, for certain, until next mail?” inquired Dalton, after a pause.

“Nor even then, perhaps, as to the liability. They are sure of you, you see, confound them! or think themselves so; though, in such a case, considering how you have been imposed upon, there

would be ample justification for your washing your hands of the whole matter. I know many a man that would do so, nor would the world blame him."

"I don't understand you. How could I wash my hands of it?"

"Well, of course it's a matter of feeling; I am not recommending you, mind, to take any steps of the kind; but it would only be acting in self-defence, if you were to say: 'I have paid enough, and more than enough, for what was always worthless, and I will pay no more.' You might realise what you could, and take yourself 'out of the jurisdiction of the court,' as the phrase is—to Sweden, for example."

"What! and leave the rest of the shareholders to bear the brunt of it?"

"That, of course, sounds like injustice; but the question is, who *are* the other shareholders? There is not one of them who has lost fifteen thousand, or five thousand, I will answer for it, beside yourself. Perhaps you are the only solvent man—I don't know, mind, but it is as likely as not—of the whole lot. If you were out of the way, it might not be worth their while to have a shot at anybody else."

"Then you think I should abscond to Sweden with my wife and family?"

"I confess I think small blame would be im-

puted to you, if you withdrew yourself till matters were settled, either to that country or elsewhere ; but as to your taking Mrs. Dalton and the young ladies, that seems to me quite out of the question."

"It is not more out of the question than that I should go myself, Holt," answered Dalton, coldly. "Pray understand that I am not yet a scoundrel, although I find myself connected with schemers, such as started the *Lara* ; it will save you a great deal of pains in making any future suggestions, if you keep that in mind." As he said this, Dalton rose from his chair, and pushing open the "dummy" door, formed of the backs of books, walked out of the room, leaving his companion to his meditations.

Mr. Richard Holt, however, was not a man to easily take offence (unless it was to his advantage—as it sometimes was—to do so) ; he doubtless made allowance for the soreness of one in whom the sense of ruin was so recent ; and when he met his friend an hour or so afterwards in the drawing-room, it was with his usual air and manner. Dalton, on his part, also soon recovered himself ; he could not but reflect that he had heard Holt give utterance to the like lax opinions and advice with respect to others, and had not rebuked him ; so that it was not surprising he should have suggested such a course in his own case, without apprehension of

giving offence. In spite of his dislike for the man, his company for the present was almost necessary to him ; he was the only person—save his wife, who did not understand them—to whom he could speak unreservedly respecting his affairs.

‘Holt might be useful to him yet ; he had a keen practical mind, and if his advice had been at one time fatal to him, it could be no longer harmful, since he had nothing to lose. So much of assistance it seemed to him he had a right to claim. But as to accepting from him any such help as had been suggested, that was not to be thought of. He had never been indebted to him for any favour—his instinct had warned him against that from the first ; and now least of all, in his wretchedness and ruin, did he feel inclined to accept assistance at his hands.

CHAPTER XII.

SYMPATHETIC INK.

THE days at Riverside went on as of old: there were croquet-parties, riding parties, water-parties, during the day-time; and in the evening there were dinner-parties, dancing parties, and charades. The house was neither gayer nor less gay than it was wont to be, and in all these entertainments John Dalton bore his part—which was always the chief part. He possessed the reputation of being the “life and soul” of every social gathering, and he had to sustain it; just as a great nobleman must “keep up” his vast estate, although he is in reality as poor as his meanest tenant. It was not so difficult a task as many would imagine. The high spirits which had hitherto carried him so bravely and buoyantly on the very top of the wave, it is true, had vanished; but the light manner and the sparkling wit remained—they had become as natural to him as pomposity or melancholy to

another; and it needed a keen observer to note that paste had taken the place of the diamond. It was only remarked of him that he was growing cynical, a condition at which most men of wit and pleasure arrive long before his time of life.

Jenny, indeed, had gravely asked: "Mamma, what is the matter with dear papa?" And when her mother had answered, "Nothing, darling," she came to the conclusion there was something very bad indeed. But Jenny, as we have heard her observe, was a looker-on at the game of life, and saw more of it than the players.

On the third day, the answers to John Dalton's applications to his friends began to arrive; each of them a page of human nature, complete and characteristic in itself, yet differing from all the rest only in degree. He was a man too popular with the crowd—for the "crowd" is a term that suits with the highest fashion and the most cultured minds, as fitly as with the lowest and the most ignorant—to have secured the best sort of friends. He had "dulled his palm" too much with welcoming mere comrades, to have grappled to himself true men with hooks of steel. That kind, perhaps, did not exist in the society among which he had moved, and where *camaraderie* rather than friendship was cultivated; but such hearts as there had

been to win, he had really won. He did not receive one letter such as satirists have described as the reply of a rich man to a ruined one. No man absolutely turned his back upon him, or offered him a five-pound note in compromise and farewell.

His knowledge of the world had doubtless prevented him from applying to the intrinsically base. Yet these letters were very various—there were some that brought the blood into his cheek for very shame, and some the tears into his eyes, with their outspoken tenderness and generosity. There were apprehensive letters—or what, perhaps, his soreness only took for such; letters in which he thought he read a fear lest the writer should be called upon to put his hand into his pocket; and there were letters in which such offers as the following were to be found, couched in more or less delicate phrase: “As to money, my dear fellow, though you do not mention it, and I am afraid would be backward in doing so, pray remember, if you should want a banker, to apply to me.”

Three letters in which that suggestion was made came from very wealthy men, who had never in their lives known what it was to want a shilling, or a thousand pounds. If they had

made their money, their readiness to appreciate the want of it in another would have been less surprising. As it was, their generosity overwhelmed him; while it pricked his pride only a very little, for he had not the smallest intention of taking advantage of their offers. These last two classes were, of course, at the opposite ends of the scale of his correspondents. Between them came a number of replies representing less marked varieties of character. What was most displeasing to him were the conventional condolences which were expressed, and especially the confident expectations the writers affected to entertain that all things would be well with him by-and-by. "A man with ready wit like yours," some said, "cannot long be without some profitable employment;" and one even wrote that "he could hardly help congratulating a man of such abilities that he would be now compelled, though the compulsion for the moment might seem irksome"—("Confound his impudence!" exclaimed Dalton in a fury)—"to apply them to the benefit of the State; for, as to his getting some high post under Government, there could not be the smallest doubt."

As to this last, almost all his friends were agreed in the same view; they had not "the smallest doubt" that he would get something—

“and at once,” added the more sanguine—“which would relieve him from his anxieties, and perhaps place him in a more agreeable groove of existence than he had hitherto occupied.” Only a few honest friends allowed that he was “in a hole,” and hoped, evidently against hope, that he would be soon out of it. He noticed, with a bitter smile, that these last persons had themselves been place-hunters in their time, and understood the difficulties of the pursuit.

For the rest, the answer to the main question which he had addressed to each was in every case the same, and identical with that given to all beggars: “I am very sorry, my good man, but I have nothing for you.”

Dalton felt that they had spoken the truth; but the truth was only less bitter than if they had replied: “We have something, but we will not give it to you.” Such would in effect be the answer of Sir William Skipton, he knew, no matter in what terms it was conveyed, and he was not going to put himself in the way of such a rebuff. He had already exhausted every channel to which he might reasonably look for aid, and it was idle indeed to make application in less likely quarters.

A day or two more passed by, and the last of

the replies had reached him. They all told the same tale. There was nothing for him but to wait and *not* hope—there was no ground, in truth, to build ever so small a hope upon. He had laid all the letters before his wife, and she had perused them with infinite care; not glancing through them with a sort of scornful impatience, as he had done, and then throwing them aside, but well weighing every word, and from some extracting here and there a grain of comfort. But her great consolation and hope of help lay elsewhere altogether.

“John, dear, God will never forsake us; however we may have deserved His wrath, He will never leave our innocent children to starve.”

“You have deserved nothing but good of Him,” cried Dalton, passionately. “That is what makes it so bitter to me.”

“Oh John, how can you talk so!” pleaded she, earnestly. “We have little—at least I am sure that *I* have fallen very, very far short of my duty, and many times; and even if it had not been so, if I had been what your blind love supposes, does not St. Paul himself call himself the chief of sinners?”

“Yes, but he did not believe it; or if he did, he had his reasons: *you* never went about perse-

cuting people, for example, to persuade them to be Pharisees."

"Oh John, John! I beseech you, whatever happens, do not give up your faith. It is certain we are all sinners."

"I am quite willing to own as much in my own case," answered her husband. "I don't say I have not deserved even such a blow as this; but as for you and the children—you will not tell me, I suppose, that Jenny, whom nothing but a miracle could have healed from the first, and who will now perish from sheer lack of means to save her, has deserved it? There, darling; I am sorry: don't give way like that. I was wrong, very wrong, to talk so, but I feel at times so desperate. It is over now. You shall never hear me question the decrees of Fate again."

He kept his word to her from that hour; but in his heart he did still question them, and resented them; for bright, and even brilliant, though it was, John Dalton had a very undisciplined mind. Moreover, he had been all his life a favourite of Fortune, and now that she had turned her back upon him, he was as furious as a lover who has just been jilted. The world was not only out of joint with him, because this *Lara* mine had turned out an ill-success, but both worlds. The whole

system of the universe seemed to him either to be thrown out of gear, or to be wrong *ab ovo* : a state of mind which will appear not only intensely wicked, but absurdly unreasonable, to all persons who have not experienced a like misfortune. In sober fact, the three thousand pounds or so which still remained to him, and which some would no doubt regard as a small fortune, seemed to one of his habits a mere stop-gap—a halting-place upon the road to ruin; and in his place, it would probably have so appeared to most of us. He felt himself “going under”—not, indeed, at one plunge, but quite as surely as though it had been so, and that he was dragging with him those he loved into the depths of poverty—a condition which they were utterly unfitted to endure. Escape for himself there was none; he no longer looked, or wished for any such; but how to rescue his wife and children was a problem that was never absent from his mind. And at last a plan occurred to him. He had had it, fitfully, in his mind before, but had always discarded it for a certain reason; but now it was suggested to him anew by his host, of course unwittingly, since he had not been let into the secret of his misfortune.

Mr. Campden was a man who, though not exactly what is called “self-made,” had risen from compara-

tively small beginnings; his father had had a moderately good business, which enabled him to send his son to college, where he had first become acquainted with Dalton; and this business—it was type-founding—the younger Campden had greatly extended. But the mass of his fortune had arisen—with great help from a quarter already mentioned—from the eligible investment of his savings. He held on to what he had once bought through good report and evil report, and in almost all cases—even when the stock was depreciated—had found his account in doing so. He contended that in this consisted the great advantage which a rich man possesses over a poor one in the matter of speculation—that he can afford to hold on.

He had shares in every description of property : in banks, in railways, and in ships; and taking them all round, his investments had been very fortunate. He was the last man to boast of his wealth—*purse-pride* was a sentiment utterly beneath and foreign to his wholesome nature; but he did plume himself a little upon those transactions which had done credit to his judgment.

Some ten days after the misfortune that had befallen his guest, a certain dividend came to him by the morning post which afforded him unusual satisfaction.

He threw it across the table with a chuckle, and bade Dalton look at it. How little he knew that he was behaving like the cruel school-boy to his hungry class-fellow: "Do you like cake? then see me eat it." He would rather have cut his hand off, or at all events a finger, than have insulted the ruined man with the display of his good fortune.

Dalton ran his eye over the sum-total, which was in four figures.

"You must have a heap of money in the concern," said he, carelessly, "to produce such a dividend as this!"

"Not at all," replied the other, gleefully; "but it has never paid less than ten per cent. since the Board took my advice in a certain matter. It's the *Palm Branch Insurance Society*."

"Indeed," replied Dalton, as coldly as before; but he felt the colour rush to his cheeks, and then ebb again. The *Palm Branch* was the company in which his own life was insured for five thousand pounds. "And how was it you raised the dividend?"

"Well, it was the simplest thing in the world. I had long noticed that the insurance companies that were most popular with the public are those which cover every description of loss, and which

do not haggle about exceptional risks. A man don't want to go to the Cannibal Islands—and as a matter of fact doesn't go—but he also does not like to be told that he may not do so if he chooses. Well, I, as their chairman, persuaded my brother-directors to sweep all these restrictions away, and the results have been surprisingly satisfactory. Our applications for policies have almost doubled, and yet we are not a penny the worse. A man may even join the *Palm Branch*, and cut his throat the next morning if he pleases, and yet his widow will get her money."

"And nobody has ever done it?"

It seemed to Dalton, as he put this question, that every one was looking at him, though for his part he looked at none, but toying with his tea-spoon, stared at the bottom of his cup. His wife, he felt certain, had her eye upon him, and Holt also.

"Of course nobody has done it," returned his host, contemptuously; "and it is ten thousand to one that nobody ever will. If he does, so much the better for us. We should pay his policy in a month by the increase of our clients. 'The *Palm Branch* for our money,' they will say, 'for it makes no objections to anything.' Other companies are already copying us so far as to allow their people to put an end to themselves after six months; but

that is a half-measure which will do neither good nor harm. It is the most satisfactory suggestion in the way of business that ever I made."

"I think it a very horrid one," remarked Mrs. Campden, sententiously.

"Then you mustn't drive your new pair of ponies any more, my dear," was her husband's quiet reply, "for the price of them came out of it."

"Well, I suppose it is not so bad as it looks," returned the hostess, in a more mitigated tone; "but, on the first blush of it, it appears almost like a premium upon suicide."

"No, my dear, the suicide pays the premium, not we; though perhaps he may only do it once."

"I do not see anything to joke about, Mr. Campden, on so shocking a subject," observed the lady, austere, as she rose with the rest of her sex from the now finished repast.

"I assure you, my dear, I only wished to remove your scruples about those ponies. They are really not the price of blood, because nobody has yet reaped any advantage from our new arrangement. There is, perhaps, a little temptation to some of our clients when they shave; but as to using their razors for——"

"Ugh!" interrupted the lady, as she swept

out of the room in the rear of her retreating force. "Don't talk of such things, I beg. If that is what you call humour, I am glad I don't understand it."

"Now, my wife would drive those ponies, Dalton—and with just as great satisfaction—if half our board of directors should cut their throats to-morrow," observed Mr. Campden, as the door closed behind her.

"But not if the chairman did it, I hope?" said Dalton, smiling.

"Well, I think in that case she'd wait—perhaps a week," answered the host, with a cheerful laugh. His dividend had put him in great good-humour.

For the moment nothing more was said; but when Dalton and his host were presently smoking their cigars together in the garden, the former resumed the subject.

"I suppose," said he, "this obliging permission of yours, to all whom it may concern to make away with themselves, is not retrospective? You don't allow people to do it who have insured with you under the old system?"

"Well, no; because there is nothing attractive about that to new clients. But at the same time there is some doubt—at least so our secretary thinks, who is a lawyer—whether they might not

take advantage of the concession if they would. It seems deuced hard that a man who has insured with us for twenty years, for example, may not blow his brains out if he pleases, while any fellow who joined us yesterday enjoys the privilege. For my part, however, I think the law would be upon our side, and—setting aside that the thing is a crime—the Gospel too. We have agreed with the old set for a penny a day ; and if we choose to give the new ones twopence, the former have no right to complain.”

“ You mean no legal right ? ” observed Dalton, to whom a parable from the Scriptures had just now no overwhelming force of conviction.

“ Well, yes. Of course there would be something to be said morally—if the subject admitted of morals—upon the other side. The man who had insured with us for twenty years, for example, would certainly not be as guilty of fraud, if he were to commit suicide and to conceal it, as he would have been had our new system never been inaugurated. There would, at all events, be more excuse for him, since his case would, by comparison, be a hard one.”

“ And yet I suppose you would not pay a policy thus forfeited ? ”

“ Yes ; I should recommend it to be paid,

because I think it would be *our* policy to pay it. It would be a most splendid advertisement, and would not cost more than the usual method of advertising. You have no idea what a lot of money is spent in that way, even by an insurance company."

And Mr. Campden went off into statistics upon that subject, and the topic of life-insurance was dropped.

Mr. Campden was a man of large ideas in business transactions, and hated details, unless they were of real importance; he had never had the curiosity to peruse the list of policy-holders in the *Palm Branch*, and was quite ignorant that his guest—who, on his part, never troubled his friends with his own affairs—was insured in it.

Mrs. Dalton, whose parents had died while she was little more than a child, had come of age shortly before her marriage, and, as we have said, had refused to have her fortune of ten thousand pounds settled upon her in the usual way, but had given the absolute disposal of it to her husband; and he in his turn—though at that time he had thought the money as safe from any act of his as though it had been tied up by the most stringent of deeds—had insured his life for half that sum, namely, five thousand pounds. He had

not dreamed, although the thing had thus been done in the way of a "set off," that this provision for his family would ever be a matter of great moment; but its importance, if "anything should happen to him," had now become paramount. This sum, added to the three thousand pounds which he still possessed, would secure them a competency. On the other hand, if he should continue to live on, the three thousand pounds would be spent all the quicker, for instead of being the bread-winner of his family, he would only be the largest consumer of their bread; while the insurance itself would be a millstone about their necks, by reason of the yearly premiums, one of which, as it happened, was due in a month's time.

CHAPTER XIII.

JENNY'S SUSPICIONS.

ALTHOUGH the affliction from which Miss Jenny Dalton suffered was not one which the visits of general practitioners (or even of physicians) could appreciably benefit, the family doctor was accustomed to call upon her daily in Cardigan Place; and even in the country it had been some source of comfort to her mother that good Dr. Curzon should "look in" and see how matters were going on with the invalid, at least once or twice a week. He was as kind as he was clever, and his kindness, at all events, seemed to do her good. Jenny "believed in him" implicitly, though her faith was by no means lightly won. He never indulged in the commonplaces of his craft, or prophesied smooth things to her. She might get a little better, he told her; but he never held out any expectation of her getting well, which indeed, if it had happened, would have been a miracle. To a

looker-on, her condition seemed not only hopeless, but necessarily unhappy. To move with pain, and often to be unable to move, without assistance, at all; to pass bright summer days stretched upon a sofa, and to lie awake, sometimes in pain, through weary nights; to see girls of her own age busy with their mallets in the croquet-ground, or taking the wholesome kisses of the air on horseback, while she had to content herself with books or lacework, seemed a hard lot. The future, too, appeared to be more full of vain regrets and sad comparisons than the present; it was certain that she would never feel a lover's kiss or know a husband's love. The dreams and hopes of girlhood were not for her, and yet Jenny was far from being unhappy.

Her intellectual tastes were catholic, and she was an omnivorous reader; in her huge mahogany desk—she had others, of rosewood and mother-of-pearl, but this one, a gift of her old nurse, Haywood, years and years ago, was her special favourite—she kept a store of treasures hidden from every eye, the laying up of which was more delightful to her than the growth of a miser's store—precious manuscripts in a fast-flowing hand—"tragedy, comedy, pastoral, pastoral-comical, scene indivisible, and poem unlimited"—all the various coin that comes from the mint of the teeming brain of

youth. If she could not mix with the world around her, she had a world of her own, peopled by creatures of her own invention, into which no mortal could intrude without her leave.

When others thought her wholly wrapped up in weaving that fairy filigree of lacework which was so greatly admired and extravagantly estimated by amateurs, it was often only her fingers that were thus employed; her brain was busy with that other work, of which no one knew the secret, though perhaps one—so keen is a mother's love—had guessed at it.

Concealment is not always like the worm i' the bud; in the case of the literary aspirant, it is a wholesome sign, and has a wholesome effect; the scribbler and the witling pine for fame and the immediate fruition of their gifts, and shrink only from the critic; but modest worth, ere its blossom blows, shrinks from the very eye of day.

If Dr. Curzon had known how his patient employed herself—not only in times suitable for study, but not seldom in the weary watches of the night—he would perhaps have forbidden such employment; but as it was, being totally ignorant of the well-spring of her content and patience, Jenny was simply a physiological marvel to him, the cheerfulest caged and suffering bird he knew.

“Doctor,” said Jenny, one morning, when he had concluded his professional inquiries—such as they were—and had touched, in his funny way, upon all his several topics—lacework, literature, Tony, and the condition of some of his own poor folks whom Jenny had privately under her wing, so far as it could shield them—“Doctor, can you keep a secret?”

“My dear,” returned he, “I was born for that very purpose; Mumm’s champagne is not so still.”

“But, dear doctor, I am in earnest. It is a serious matter, and one which, perhaps, since he himself has not spoken to you about it, I ought not to mention; but it is my belief that papa is ill.”

“Your papa ill? Well, he ought to be, no doubt, considering the rich men’s feasts at which he has sat so constantly for the last twenty years; but I have very little hopes of it.”

“Hopes of it!”

“I speak as a professional man, my dear. As a friend, of course I should be sorry to see any signs of a break-up in his system; but he seems to me to be made of iron.”

“On the contrary, I am convinced that he is very unwell. He has no appetite; his spirits are forced; his manner is wholly changed. I don’t

think he hears what is said to him once out of three times."

"Liver."

"Perhaps; but, at all events, it should be looked to. He will never tell you a word about it of himself. He only believes in doctors for other people, you know."

"That is something, however; I *have* met wretches who have not even that faith by proxy. Well, am I to ask your papa to be a good boy, and put out his tongue? Nothing can be done, you know, without that."

"You can find out what is the matter, without appearing to be inquisitive, doctor, as I know very well."

"But do you mean to say that your mother is ignorant of this indisposition—that is, supposing that there is really anything the matter?"

"No, indeed; she is quite aware of it, but has been forbidden to speak. I know her so well, and also how papa dislikes any fuss made about himself. It is making her very wretched, I can see. We go to town next week, and then he will fall into the hands of Dr. Jones—if he is persuaded to consult anyone—and I don't believe in Dr. Jones."

"Quite right; vote for Curzon and country air, my dear."

“Well, at all events, papa has confidence in you, and will listen to what you say; you have tact, as I have said, and our medical friend in town has none. It will be very bad for mamma, in a few months’ time, if papa was to have a bad illness.”

“So it would, no doubt. She is not one to bear much worry at any time. I mean, she would bear it—God help her!—like a hero, only it would kill her.”

“Oh doctor, don’t say that!” cried Jenny, quickly.

“Nay, my dear; don’t be frightened. Even if your father had a fit of the gout, your mother would get over it, and he is not likely to have worse than gout. I was, of course, only speaking of some very serious trouble, such as, let us hope, is not likely to befall either her or hers. She takes things to heart too much, and at the same time is inclined to keep all her miseries to herself. That is my view of her.”

“I cannot say what is *my* view, doctor, it keeps changing so. It seems to me, to-day, that I cannot love her more—that she is all perfection; but to-morrow I shall have found out some fresh excellence in her, I know, which will lay upon her children a new debt of gratitude and affection. I

have had no experience of angels, but I shall be quite content if I find heaven peopled by such folks as my mamma."

The doctor smiled, and laid his hand upon Jenny's luxuriant tresses, in tender approval.

"And you tremble lest this mother, to whom you are so justly devoted, should be soon going to heaven, Jenny?" said he, gravely. "Am I not right?"

"Yes, doctor," answered she, in a half-choked whisper. "Such is my selfish fear. I dread her exchanging this world for eternal happiness in the next, where, perhaps, I shall not be. O doctor, tell me truly, do you think she is going to leave us?"

"No, Jenny," was the quick reply. "I see no reason for any such apprehension. She is delicate, of course—almost as fragile as yourself; and she has a trial before her which I wish she could be spared; but so long as she has no anxieties—and she has none now, for you are certainly getting stronger—and can keep her heart up, she will do well enough."

"Then that is only another reason why papa should take care of himself, or rather be taken care of. I am, I repeat, quite confident that he requires care. That *he* should fail in spirits is a

portent that it is impossible to disregard, if there were no worse symptoms."

"But that may be from other causes than physical indisposition. He has his troubles, of course—for all his mirth and brightness—like other people; perhaps they are just now a little thicker than usual. There was that disappointment down at Bampton, for example."

"I thought of that, of course, doctor; but I have made certain it is not Bampton. I have heard him say myself, in a manner that I am sure was genuine, that he does not regret his defeat, except, of course, for what it cost him; and the money, as I know, he made up his mind to spend."

"Well, well, my dear, I will do my best to physic your papa, if he really needs it, in spite of himself; you shall work it up in his food for him, like the poisoners."

But in spite of his light way of treating the affair—which was indeed natural with him—the doctor knew Jenny far too well to doubt that there was something really wrong with her father, though he was not so ready as the majority of his calling would have been to set it down, as he had pretended to do, to "liver."

The fact was, that Dr. Curzon—than whom a discreeter or more prudent man was not supposed,

in that part of the country, to exist, had himself once lost five hundred pounds, his entire savings for many a long year—in “a perfectly safe investment;” and knowing the strength of that sort of temptation, if he had heard that the Archbishop of Canterbury had been obliged to let Lambeth Palace for the season to some opulent Hebrew, on account of speculation in “Turks,” he would not have been astonished. In the case of an idle and extravagant man like John Dalton, it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that he should have “burnt his fingers” with some attractive speculation or another, and that the loss had affected his appetite. Perhaps the good doctor was not wholly free from that sense of pleasure said to be excited by the misfortunes of our friends; but if it was so, this, in his case, solely arose from the complacent satisfaction he derived from so sharp a fellow as Dalton having fallen into the same pit as himself. He had no idea, of course, of the depth he had fallen, nor how much he had hurt himself, or there would have been no room in his kind heart for anything but the sincerest sympathy. If this was the nature of his friend’s ailment, he could indeed do nothing in the way of help; so that, upon the whole, he would have compounded for him to have been menaced with

a good sharp attack of gout or rheumatism, against which his professional aid might be of use. It was hardly more likely—as he was well aware—that Dalton should consult him in the one case than in the other; but as he happened to have an opportunity of being alone with him on that same afternoon, he thought he would “just have a shot at the ducks”—a playful expression he was accustomed to apply to all experiments of an empirical nature.

“My dear Dalton,” said he, “now we have done talking of your daughter, I should like to say one word about yourself. She has told me—quite in confidence, indeed she has told no one else, not even her mother—that you have been getting out of sorts lately.”

“What on earth makes her think that?” replied Dalton, laughing. “I am as hard as nails, and as fresh as paint.”

“Then I am sorry I spoke,” said the doctor, drily.

“You need not be that, Curzon. Of course I shall not tell Jenny that you mentioned it.”

“I was not thinking of Jenny. I said I am sorry, because, of course, I have no right to pry into your private affairs; and since you tell me you are not ill, it is clear that you have some serious

trouble. I am quite sure Jenny has made no mistake as to *something* being the matter."

"Well, then, I have a trouble," said Dalton, quickly; "and I have no objection to reveal its nature to you—provided that it goes no farther. If it was to be known, I should lose, for one thing, my self-respect."

"I hope that is an exaggeration," answered the other, gravely. "It is not uncommon with men to accuse themselves of having acted improperly, when they have, in fact, only made an error in judgment, that has cost them dear. Nevertheless, if you feel it a humiliation to speak of the matter, do not do so."

Dalton smiled. "I am grateful to you for your delicate consideration, my dear doctor; and am quite ashamed to have evoked it, by what, I fear, you will consider to be false pretences. My ailment is very slight, though I allow I have one. The fact is, I have been worried day and night for the last week by toothache. I am a shocking coward not to have it out, of course, and that is just what I don't want people to know; and that is the long and short of the whole matter."

"Let me look at the tooth."

"Not I," said Dalton, stepping back with a light laugh. "Your fingers shall not come near

it. I don't doubt that you have some terrible instrument up your sleeve at this very moment. At all events, I won't trust you. I daresay a less excitable man would think nothing of it; and I could grin and bear it myself—indeed, I thought I had done so pretty well, only it seems Jenny's eyes were too sharp for me—if I could only sleep o' nights."

"It's so bad as that, is it?"

"It is. I have absolutely no rest. My appetite too, I daresay, seems to have fallen off, but that is because I am afraid to eat. There is no pleasure in life while this thumping and jumping are going on in one's jaw."

"You have the character of being a very clever fellow, Dalton——"

"Oh, never mind that," interrupted the other. "I may be twice as clever as Dizzy himself, but you may be sure of one thing—that I won't have it out. I have had a tooth out before; a double one, just like this. The first pull was only torture; the second I thought was the end of the world; the third, the man broke my jaw. Of course there is such a thing as chloroform, but I have reasons for objecting to chloroform."

"I was about to say, Dalton," observed the doctor, coolly, "that although you were such a

clever fellow, you have, in this instance, fallen into a mistake, from which your intelligence should have preserved you—the mistake of undervaluing the wits of others. I am country-born and country-bred, and, I have no doubt, very inferior to your London men of the world; but I am not quite such a fool as you seem to have taken me for. It would have been wiser in you—and, I venture to add, more friendly—to have told me the truth about yourself, or to have told me nothing.”

“But, upon my word and honour, I have the toothache.”

“I don’t doubt it; I did not pay you so bad a compliment as to suppose you capable of a downright falsehood. But when you said, ‘I will tell you what is my trouble,’ I expected to hear it, and not merely what is doubtless an aggravation of it; but still——”

“My dear Curzon, I scarcely know what I say,” interrupted the other, gloomily. “For Heaven’s sake, bear with me, for I am sick at heart.”

“You? Of all men, I should have said you were the least likely to be that. You have a wife, of whom any man may well be proud; your children are just the brightest and the dearest——”

“Don’t speak of them, Curzon; it is upon

their account—God help them!—that I am so unmanned.” He pushed the still plenteous hair back from his broad forehead with both his hands, and paced the room with rapid strides. “It is curious that you should have spoken to me this afternoon upon the very subject that I have been wishing to speak to you for many a day. I want your advice, doctor, your best advice, upon a matter of which, as I believe, no one has as yet any suspicion. We are liable to interruption here; and if I consulted you upstairs, it would excite remark.”

“You wish to speak with me, then, professionally?”

“Of course. How else should there be any secret about it? When am I most likely to find you at home?”

“I will make a point of being so at any time you please.”

“Let us say at noon to-morrow, then. I will take the boat over, and drop down on you over the crags. I can go that way without any one suspecting it, and be back at luncheon without being missed. Perhaps you will think of something in the meantime for my toothache—a drop or two of laudanum at bed-time, for example, will give me a night’s rest.”

“I’ll send my boy over with some this evening.”

“No, no; don’t trouble to do that. I don’t want my wife to know that I have said a word about my health; and the arrival of any bottle from your vineyard would be very suspicious. I would rather bring it back myself to-morrow.” And so the matter was arranged.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW DR. CURZON'S LITTLE ACCOUNT WAS SETTLED.

AN American philosopher has likened the position of a man "waiting for something to turn up" to one who goes into a field, and sits with a pail between his legs, expecting that presently a cow will back up to him to be milked; and though John Dalton was unaware of the metaphor, his sensations were identical with that of the man with the pail. Indeed, they were still less sanguine, for, to his eyes, there was no cow in the field at all. He had hitherto—save with respect to the state of health of his wife and Jenny, about which he was always more or less apprehensive—been a stranger to anxiety. He had had no grounds for it in any direction. His position and income had been assured. He had not been an extravagant man, but had always lived up to his means, without saving a penny; for there had been no need to save. He had not laid up anything against a rainy day, because his atmo-

sphere—like that of some tropical regions—seemed incapable of rain. And now a deluge had fallen, the unexpectedness of the catastrophe had overwhelmed him, quite as much as its magnitude. Moreover, bad as things were, it was certain that they would become worse; it was only a question of time as to it being all over with him and his. His condition was precisely that of one who stands upon a rock at present a little above the waves, but which the advancing tide is as sure to cover with eight feet of water as is the sun to set or the moon to rise. Some men—perhaps most men—would stick to that temporary refuge, wet and shivering, to the very last, while limb after limb was being submerged; but others, though they could not swim a stroke, would “take arms against that sea of troubles, and by opposing end them”—would plunge in, and anticipate their doom.

To one of Dalton’s sensitive and nervous organisation, suspense would perhaps in any case have been harder to endure than calamity; but his was suspense which could only have one end—that of hopeless ruin; and meanwhile the ruin was always before his eyes. Already he saw his wretched store dwindling day by day till nothing was left; his delicate wife, his ailing child, suffering all the inconveniences of poverty, the hardships of want,

and then the pangs of destitution. As a matter of fact, the last was out of the question, for two reasons: they would never live through the two first stages; nor would their friends, even the least genuine of them, have permitted the third. But the only alternative was the humiliation of dependence, the bitterness of beggary. And this was supposing that the three thousand pounds on which he had calculated would remain intact; that there would be no further liabilities for the *Lara* mine than the shares in full. He fed upon these miserable thoughts both night and day, and upon the top of it all was the necessity of appearing calm and free from care—nay, of even keeping up his character for high spirits. A duller man would have taken matters more quietly; a wiser man would have called in some philosophy to his aid, and would certainly not have abandoned hope; but with this man—with his light ways and undisciplined mind—it was as though a butterfly had been caught in the “frozen palms” of winter. It was not to be wondered at, under the circumstances, that life was growing intolerable to John Dalton. There had been rain for a day or two which had swollen the Nathay to unusual dimensions, and Uncle George proposed at breakfast one morning that they should take the steam-yacht up to the mere—a suggestion that met

with great applause from the young people. It was the first time that the voyage had been practicable since the Daltons had come to Riverside, so that to Kate and Jenny and Tony it had all the charm of novelty. Indeed, the Campdens themselves had as little pleasure out of their steam-yacht—save what they might derive from the mere possession of so fine a toy—as it is possible to imagine; and even on the present occasion the water in the river was said to be falling so rapidly that it was necessary they should start at once, while there was yet enough of it to float the vessel. If they waited till the afternoon, they might reach the mere, but would scarcely get back again, was the verdict of the Admiral of the Fleet, as the chief man in charge of the boats had been called by Jenny; so that there was no choice about the matter.

“O papa, can you really not come with us?” exclaimed Kitty, piteously.

He had already taken care to explain that he would be engaged that morning, in order to be free to keep his appointment with Dr. Curzon; and the proposed expedition was welcome to him, since it would secure his departure from observation.

“No, my darling; indeed, I cannot,” said he.

“But your company is half the battle,” observed Mrs. Campden, graciously.

“Nay; you will have no battle at all without me,” replied he, in laughing allusion to his frequent combats with his hostess.

“I mean, sir, that we shall never get on without you.”

“But, my dear madam, you never get on *with* me.”

It is impossible to describe in words the air and manner which made Dalton's speeches void of offence; but even his enemies allowed that he had an “agreeable insolence,” which it was very difficult to resent without being put entirely in the wrong. If he had made up his mind not to do a thing, it was known for certain by those who knew him—though he never gave a flat refusal—that he would not do it; and his hostess made no further effort to persuade him to join the water-party.

He retired to the library after breakfast, in accordance with his pretence of writing letters of business; but he had, in fact, no business now, while of writing letters he had had of late more than enough. He was indeed only waiting until the others should be off and the coast clear for him to start upon his visit to the doctor. Now he would pace the room with impatient strides, and now—when a footstep came near the door—would seat himself quickly at his desk with the paper and

pen before him ; and now he would start up again and resume his walk ; and now would aimlessly take down from the well-lined walls a book, and read a few lines, then put the volume back mechanically, like one in a dream. He felt that he was losing his volition ; that except for that certain line of conduct which he had marked out for himself, and which, since yesterday, was ever present to his mind, he had no adaptability, nor force, nor will. Everything else was outside of him, as it were, and possessed no interest for him. It had been with the utmost difficulty, when, at breakfast-time, his host had asked his opinion concerning some Cabinet question treated of in the newspaper, that he could gather his wits together to express his views. The difference between Whig and Tory had become even less to him than that between Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee. He was above all things, in his political feelings, an Englishman, and yet he felt that if news had come that morning that his country was at war, it would not have quickened his pulses by a single beat. Only one thing gained his attention for a moment—a volume of the “Annual Register” had been one of those which he took up, and in it his eye chanced to light upon a strange tragedy that had, years ago, taken place in France ; it was the story of a hump-

backed boy, a mere child, who had lost his parents, and been left dependent upon an uncle for subsistence. This man had worked him like a slave, yet was always beating and ill-treating him ; and when the poor child was away from his wretched home, the boys in the street would jeer at him, because of his defect in shape. At last, wearied out by toil and ill-usage, and the universal contempt, the humpback had ended his misery by hanging himself in a wood near Paris. At the bottom of the tree was found a scrap of paper with these words upon it, "I have had enough of it," signed with the little fellow's name.

The whole story was contained in a paragraph, but it was the tragedy of a human life. Under other circumstances, Dalton would have given a sigh of sympathy for the victim, uttered a curse against his persecutor, and have forgotten the wretched tale as soon as possible. But now it clung to him like a very shirt of Nessus, and filled him with poisonous thoughts. Here was a child, sent into the world deformed, to be tortured in body and mind until he was driven to put an end to himself. Where was justice ? Where was mercy ? Where was Providence ? Some persons in Dalton's case would perhaps have comforted themselves with the reflection that, however unpleasant their lines in life

had fallen, they were, at all events, far preferable to those of the poor hunchback; they would have extracted consolation from the fact that they had deserved worse things than this unhappy child, yet had experienced better, and would perhaps even have felt gratitude on that account. But Dalton took up the cudgels against Fate itself, upon the child's account, almost unaware that he was moved to do so by his own consciousness of wrongs; indeed, to do him justice, he had not himself, but only his belongings, in view. He was ready to own that he deserved considerable punishment—not perhaps quite so severe as had befallen him, but punishment within reasonable limits—but as respected his wife and children, he was very bitter and rebellious. “They have done *no* hurt, and yet they are doomed to misery; and though I have sinned, I have not sinned so deeply as to deserve that I, who love them so, should have been the cause of their ruin.”

“It was a wretched, ill-governed world in which such things were possible,” was the reflection that he made to himself, though he would not perhaps have ventured to say as much. He kept on repeating to himself the last words of the poor hunchback: “I have had enough of it—I have had enough of it—I have had enough of it!” not consecutively,

but from time to time, and after intervals of gloomy thought. Presently, the noises that betoken the departure of a party of pleasure were heard in the hall without; the chatter of female voices, and the ripple of laughter, the opening and shutting of doors, and the eager cries of Tony. Then a light footstep in the passage, and a gentle knock at the door.

"Well, my darling, we are going. I thought it right to go, lest the girls should think something was amiss."

His wife was looking very pale, but the smile on her sweet face was as bright as ever. It was put on for him, he knew, and had cost her not a little.

"How brave and good you are, Edith!"

"Don't, *don't* talk like that, John, or I shall utterly break down," replied she, earnestly. "You will be at home when we come back, dear?"

"Yes, dear, yes. Perhaps I may come up to the mere from Bleabarrow way, when I have written my letters."

She knew that he had no letters to write, at least of any consequence, and had but little hope of his coming up to the mere. Yet she answered: "Oh, that will be so nice, and be such a pleasant surprise to the children! Good-bye, my darling!"

“Good-bye.” They kissed one another, as though they had been young lovers parting for the first time; indeed, they had never loved one another more than since these evil days had come upon them.

Then she went out, throwing back a look of loving farewell, to play her part in the gay picnic, for into such the excursion had resolved itself—while he was left a far easier task—to bear the importunate Care alone. He sat down with his head between his hands, as though, with that faithful partner, Hope itself had fled. It is no exaggeration to say that he looked older by some years in those few moments; for the sense of irremediable loss—of separation for ever—was heavy upon him. His step, when he rose up and crossed the hall to fetch his hat, was slow and hesitating, like the gait of an old man.

Once out of doors, however, the open air revived him; the scent and beauty of the garden flowers, the bright sunshine, and the loveliness of the surrounding landscape, had also their effect. When Nature frowns it is certain that our wretchedness is thereby intensified. A November evening, with thick fog abroad, has probably turned the scale, in some despairing wretch’s mind, towards death, when, under brighter external influences,

he would have lived on; and Nature's smiles have life in them, even when they seem to mock our misery. Moreover, in Dalton's case, there was physical action demanded of him, which is, above all things, the foe and conqueror of despondency. Without calling for the assistance of a servant, he unfastened the smallest craft among the little flotilla in the boathouse, and rowed himself—not without the necessity of putting forth some skill and strength—across the tawny, foam-flecked river; and if his boat had come to grief in that whirling stream, he would have fought and struggled for his life, no doubt, though existence had become so hateful to him. Then, when he landed on the other side, and had fastened his boat to shore, there were the steep crags to be climbed, the call on wind and muscle, and the air of the hill-top, crowning all.

For the moment his eye drank in the glorious prospect at his feet, without that consciousness of misfortune which surrounded him, now as with an atmosphere, through which all things came to his senses deadened and dull. Before him lay the long, deep valley of Sanbeck, an unsung Dove-dale, which Kitty was wont to affirm she had discovered. At all events, until the Daltons came to Riverside, there had been no great enthusiasm

displayed about its beauties. It ran very steeply down from the moorland mere to the great plain of Bleabarrow, taking a sharp turn before it debouched upon it, so that the whole valley seemed complete in itself, and shut out from the external world. But for the height of its hills, and the length to which its windings extended, which made it appear even narrower than it really was, it might have been called a dell, so solitary and self-contained it was. Yet a road which could be almost termed a highway traversed each side of the valley, crossing it near its head, where the ravine was only a narrow fissure, which a few miles on grew wide and deep, and in which an imprisoned stream ceaselessly bewailed its fate. At the bridge was the hamlet, consisting only of the little gray church and a score of scattered cottages of stone, and perched on the spurs of the hills were two or three farms. As Dalton rapidly descended, he passed by one of these homesteads, which, as it will have an interest for us hereafter, may here have its line of description. Like its neighbours, it utterly ignored landscape; the side that looked—or would have looked, had it had windows—upon the valley, was a long barn built of stone, and lit with long slits in the masonry such as are common

in old fortresses. The dwelling-house was very ancient, with a porch covered with a luxuriant creeper, that also stretched over the whole edifice, half hiding it in tangled greenery. In front was a paved courtyard, with the barn on one side, and on the other a terraced garden of small extent, but very full of the commoner and more odorous sort of flowers. There were yew trees in it, which gave it a quaint rather than a funereal aspect; for the place was altogether bright and cheerful, and singularly clean. There were no stables near it—nothing but the barn and another farm-building, under which entrance was given to “the Nook”—as the house was called—by a picturesque archway. If its builder had been a man of modern taste, many things would doubtless have been changed for the better; but taking it for what it was, a farm-house of three centuries old, it was singularly free from all that was unsightly or unsavoury. Of the beauties of Sanbeck, indeed, its indwellers could see nothing; but they had their garden, and their courtyard with its sun-dial, and even a little fountain upon the terrace—altogether a very sufficient home prospect; and they had only to pass through the archway to behold a scene that few localities could rival. The place was not now used as a farm at all, but was at present in the occupa-

tion of a wealthy yeoman, who had retired from business, and was well pleased to pass the evening of his days in the spot where he had made the rays to gild it.

Mr. Jonathan Landell—or “Old Joe,” as he was usually termed by his neighbours—had a curious passion for the collecting of ancient books, of which he was said to possess a surprising number; but with what object this store of learning—or rather the materials for it—had been acquired was doubtful. By some it was stoutly maintained that Old Joe had, from very small beginnings in the literary line, become one of the greatest of living scholars; while by another party it was asserted with equal confidence that the old gentleman knew nothing of his books beyond their titles. However that might be, the Nook and its owner were each remarkable in their way; and perhaps the peculiarity of the one reacted upon the other, and enhanced the public interest in both. If presentiments could take their rise from inanimate objects—if the room where we are to breathe our last, for example, could inform us of the fact beforehand—a new interest would be added to many things; and could Dalton have foreseen the part that the Nook was eventually to fill in the drama of his future, or rather of the future of those dear to him,

he would not have passed it by to-day with such scant notice. He had seen and admired it more than once; but its chief impression had been made upon him through the drawings of it in his elder daughter's sketch-book, with whom it was a great favourite, and who had taken it from every point of view. His mood of mind on this occasion, however, was not one to be readily affected by the picturesque in architecture, and he pursued his way down the valley, as though the Nook had in noway differed from its neighbours.

The house for which he was bound was nearly a mile beyond it, and removed a considerable distance from the road; yet from the road, as Dalton drew near his goal, he could hear cries, not so much of pain, as it seemed to him, but of rage and impatience, which evidently proceeded from the doctor's residence. The house was long and low, consisting indeed but of one story, and at the end at which it was approached an addition had been made for the reception of patients only, in the shape of a small surgery. The whole house, with the exception of this *annexe*, was covered with ivy, which rendered this place of torment uncompromisingly bare and conspicuous. Its windows too, in order that abundance of light might be afforded for the pursuit of science, were much larger than those of

the other rooms, and as the visitor passed by, he could hardly avoid throwing a glance into this chamber of horrors, the cries from which, though fainter, still continued. He fully expected to see some poor wretch's limbs being sawn off without the consolations of chloroform, or the application of the actual cautery to some shepherd bitten by a collie dog. His surprise, therefore, was considerable at perceiving the doctor alone in this apartment, pacing the room like a wild-cat, and emitting terrible ejaculations. His air was wild, and one of his legs was bare, the stocking being ungartered and down-at-heel, as in Hamlet's case. It was impossible—coupling his appearance with his howls—to help concluding that he was in the same mental condition as that unhappy prince; and the front-door opening to his hand, as is usual in country places, Dalton entered the house without ceremony, and at once presented himself in the surgery.

“ Good heavens, doctor, what is the matter ? ”

“ Fire, fire ! ” cried the unhappy medical practitioner, holding his uncovered calf with his hand, and hobbling distractedly about the room. “ I have burned myself most infernally.”

There was an odour of singed flesh in the apartment, that seemed to give corroboration to

his assertion, and, so far, to attest the victim's sanity.

"But how on earth came you to burn yourself?"

"It was that old idiot Jefferson^s who has done it. I hope he will feel what it is himself some day, only hotter and longer. It's getting better now. I'm really quite ashamed to have exhibited such—such excitement. I fancy I must almost have screamed aloud."

"Well, yes, you almost did. But how on earth came you to take *Jefferson's* advice? I should have thought you the very last man in the country to follow out any of his old-world prescriptions."

"His prescriptions? I should think so. He should not prescribe for my Tom-cat. But the fact is, I was obliged to call him in to consultation—the old humbug!—with regard to Jonathan Landell up yonder. The man is dying—even Jefferson knew that; but just to spite me, and because he knew I had no such thing as a cupping-glass in my possession, he recommended cupping. He might as well have suggested an amulet, or toad's broth. He is a medical pagan, and believes in all the dead-and-gone divinities of science."

"So I have always heard," said Dalton, consolingly. "He goes about with a cane that has salt in the head of it, and wears a muff like

Dr. Ratcliffe, does he not? You have left him nobody to murder, however, in the county, as I have always been told, except a few old dowagers.”

“That is true,” said the doctor, sitting down and nursing his bare leg; “and it is on that very account that he has revenged himself upon me in this terrible manner. ‘Mr. Landell,’ he said, in his pompous way, ‘should, in my humble opinion, be cupped. I say nothing of any shortcoming in his treatment hitherto’ (hang his impudence! think of that); ‘but the time has now arrived for stringent measures.’”

“‘Well,’ said I, wishing to humour the old fool, ‘cupping can’t hurt him, anyway.’ (There I was wrong; it hurts abominably, that is, unless you are very clever at it. And I have never cupped a man in my life. Nobody ever has who is not a hundred years old.) ‘I will cup him, by all means.’

“‘Do so, do so,’ said the old humbug, in his stately way; and off he went, drawn by those half-starved cattle of his, to prescribe some other tomfoolery to somebody else.

“It was not till he had gone that it struck me I had no cupping-glasses. One might as well be expected to have a crucible, or a mud-bath, ready at a moment’s notice; and though I have

no doubt Jefferson himself possesses the article—for his house is like an antiquarian museum in that way—I was not going to put myself under an obligation to him by borrowing it. So I wrote to such of my professional brethren as were most likely to own such an instrument, to ask the loan of it. I was obliged to explain the circumstances, lest they should think me out of my wits, so that it consumed much valuable time; and, after all, only one out of ten possessed the thing I sought.

“‘Pray keep it,’ writes he, in the letter which accompanied it, ‘for it is of no value except as a relic of an exploded system. My grandfather used to say it required an education to learn the use of it.’ You have to keep a flame up under the glass, you see—like this—any bit of paper will do—and then, just as the flame is about to expire, you clap the thing on. Well, I had to try it upon somebody; and since I could not persuade my groom to oblige me in the matter, I tried it upon myself. The calf of the leg seemed to be a safe place for the experiment; and just as the flame was about to expire, as I thought, I applied the glass, which I am bound to say stuck on; no force on earth would have moved it. The predictions of science were so far accomplished to admiration; but the fire *had not quite gone out!* There was

a living flame, sir, attached to my naked flesh, with a glass over it, as though it were some precious crocus. I had to put the strongest control upon my feelings to avoid bellowing like a bull."

"You did make rather a noise, my dear sir," said Dalton, on whom the ludicrous effect of the scene was by no means lost, notwithstanding his melancholy mood.

"Not half such a noise as you would have made," retorted the doctor, with irritation. "Now, just let me try it on the calf of *your* leg. It's a most interesting experiment in itself, and also, incidentally, involves a great question of theology. No one who has gone through with it can ever subscribe to the doctrine of the Calvinistic religion as respects the place of the wicked hereafter. I don't care how wicked a man has been; he can never deserve to bear a living flame applied to any sensitive portion of his person, and *stuck on* so that nobody can put it out. I'll guarantee to effect a complete revolution of religious opinion in the Scottish nation, if they will come to me without breeks and—— Now, do just let me try."

The doctor's manner was most cordial and persuasive; you would really have imagined that he had the abolition of human error and superstition

as his object, instead of that of excusing himself for the exhibition of a personal weakness. But Dalton was adamant, and grave withal. His sense of amusement had passed away; he almost felt a disgust with himself at having been made to smile when such heavy cares were sitting on his shoulders. "No," said he, "I will take your word for it, Curzon; and I have a pain of my own, which is quite sufficient—though it may not be such torture as you describe—without being experimentalised upon."

"To be sure; I forgot your toothache," answered the doctor, cheerily. He had rolled back the leg of his trousers, and began to assume his professional air.

"I wish *I* could forget it," continued Dalton. "It tormented me all night. You said you would give me a little laudanum for it."

"Well, laudanum is a bad thing to take to—as indeed are all things to make one sleep, notwithstanding some of them have such fine names, and are so 'highly recommended by the faculty.' I should suggest eau-de-cologne and sal-volatile in warm water to allay the pain, or—if you are really resolved not to eject so unpleasant a tenant—perhaps a little myrrh."

"Put me up what you please, but some

laudanum as well, in case the milder remedies should not relieve the pain."

"Very good."

The surgery was lined with bottles, as a library is lined with books; and the doctor proceeded to take down one or two, and pour out a little of their contents into a small phial. Dalton watched him with an air less careless than abstracted, and presently said, gravely: "After all, Curzon, this is not the matter about which I have come to consult you, but something very different, and much more serious."

"All right, my good friend. I am ready to give you my best attention; but just let me premise that patients generally—even sensible ones, like yourself—are apt to consider matters very serious when they are not so. It is the tendency of human nature to exaggerate our physical woes."

"For instance, when you blister yourself with a bit of tinder," said Dalton, forcing a smile. "Well, well, I am quite ready to be confuted; but still I have had warnings that are not, I am sure, to be lightly regarded. What I am about to tell you is, of course, in the strictest confidence, and to be revealed to no one, not even to my wife."

"My dear Dalton, a doctor's shop is the same as the confessional, except that folks tell *us* a deal

more than they ever tell the priest. Of course I shall be mum as a mouse. Now about these warnings. You think you have got heart-disease, of course ? ”

“ How did you know that ? ” exclaimed Dalton, with extreme surprise. “ Do I look like a man in that way ? Have you observed it for yourself of late ? ”

“ Not a bit of it,” was the doctor’s cool reply. “ But everybody who has ‘ warnings ’ imagines them to proceed from the same cause—the heart. Similarly, everybody who spits blood—as happens to about five people out of every six in the course of their lives—sets it down to lungs.”

“ But I am quite sure there *is* something wrong—and very much wrong——”

“ Pardon me,” interrupted the doctor ; “ you can’t be *sure* ! Doctors cannot always be sure—unless it is some such old fool as Dr. Jefferson—and patients never. Now, please to describe your symptoms.”

“ Well, I have been suffering for some time——”

“ How long ? It is above all things necessary to be explicit.”

There was a pause ; Dalton was searching his memory.

“ About six months back I began to be affected

with palpitations—an uneasy sense of movements in the heart. These have increased in frequency and violence. Of late they have given me, occasionally, great pain. At such times I have felt a stupendous oppression, and even a sensation of impending death.”

“Have you ever read about heart-disease in any medical work?” inquired the doctor.

Dalton hesitated. “Well, yes, I believe I have.”

“So do I,” answered the other, coolly; “and I should have believed it, even if you had said ‘No.’ I sometimes wish that all our professional books were tabooed to the public, as the Bible used to be to laymen. They have done more harm by putting morbid fancies into people’s heads than they have done good in healing their real diseases. I would not have them chained to a church table, because all the women go there, and would be sure to read them; but I would have them written in dog-Latin, so that neither the learned nor unlearned should be able to make them out, but only doctors.”

“What I have read, however, only corroborates what I have felt,” said Dalton, gravely.

“No doubt, my dear sir; but it is astonishing how these things seem to suggest themselves, when

they are, in fact, suggested. However, I have a little instrument here which is very truthful, and little apt even to make a mistake. 'Prithee, undo this button,' as Lear says. Open your waistcoat."

Dalton did as was required, and the doctor applied his stethoscope, putting his head on one side, like a sagacious magpie, and listening attentively. Who has not at one time or another of his life been thumped about, and bidden to take deep breaths, to cough, and all the rest of it, with a human ear glued to his chest? It is even less necessary to describe than vaccination, since some people, rather than submit to the latter operation—common fate of mortals though it be—prefer to pay half-sovereign penalties and to catch the small-pox.

"Have you had any anxieties of late, Dalton?"

The doctor was still engaged in thumping when he put this inquiry, so he could not see how the other's pale face flushed.

"You need not reply to that question unless you please," continued the investigator, "for I have already been informed that it is so."

"Who can have told you, since nobody knows of them but myself?" inquired Dalton, quickly.

"The stethoscope. Now you can button up your waistcoat."

"Then I suppose I was right in concluding that I must at least take care of myself?"

"All people who have reached middle life may say as much as that, my good sir," returned the doctor, quietly.

"Yes; but I am conscious that there is something amiss. Pray do not hesitate to tell me if it be so."

"I do not find anything organically amiss."

"But functionally you do?"

"I did not say so. You are getting into the medical books again."

"Well, I will ask you one question, to which I desire to have a simple 'Yes' or 'No.' Will you give me that plain answer?"

"I shall treat you as a sensible man, you may be sure. It is not always well to give a patient such an answer. It is very seldom judicious so to do—in the case of women, for example; though there are some women, like your wife, who are better able to bear it than most men."

"Then you agree with me that my case is really serious?"

"Is that the question to which you required the simple 'Yes' or 'No?'"

"No. I wish to know whether you are not of opinion that I am likely—— Well, I will put it

less strongly. After what I have told you, and what you have discovered for yourself, would you be greatly surprised to hear of my sudden death at any moment?"

"I should not be greatly surprised."

"Thank you. That is what I thought."

"Most people situated as you are—with just the best wife and children in the world, so far as I have seen—would say, 'That is what I feared,' Mr. Dalton."

"I have thought about it too much of late to feel fear," said Dalton, gravely. "There are some presentiments, I venture to think, that are not merely fanciful."

"There are some, indeed, that work out their own fulfilment, and therefore which should not be encouraged," put in the doctor, with still greater seriousness. "May I ask, Mr. Dalton, if your life is insured?—I have startled you, which is just what should be avoided in these cases. Pray, forgive my stupid blundering. It is insured, is it not?"

"Yes, it is insured, though only for a sum comparatively small."

"Just so. I only asked the question because incidental circumstances so much affect these cases. Now, you must oblige me, before you

leave, by taking at least a glass of wine and a sandwich."

"But I have only just breakfasted."

"Yes, but you have since then had a walk over the crags. It is very necessary to one in your condition—or supposed condition, for I have by no means issued your death-warrant, remember—to give the system constant support."

"But really——"

"Nay; you wish to keep strong and well, I suppose; you are not enamoured of your complaint—if you have one—as some invalids are. You shall have some lunch while I eat my dinner."

With that the doctor led the way into another room, where his simple mid-day meal was spread, which mainly consisted of a joint of cold roast-beef. The two sat down to this, and began talking of indifferent subjects—if anything in the doctor's case, who was wont to throw his whole being into every topic of discussion, could be said to be indifferent. Dalton talked but little, and ate, as it seemed, rather to occupy himself than because he had any appetite.

"I am afraid you find this beef a little tough," observed his host, apologetically.

"Not at all," replied the other. "On the contrary, I thought it remarkably tender."

"Then it seems to me, however right you may be as to your heart, my good friend, that you have rather exaggerated your toothache."

Dalton looked up with a flush of anger, but his host appeared to be too busily engaged in mastication to observe it.

"I didn't recommend the pickles," he went on, coolly, "because hot things, they say, are bad for a tender tooth."

"Everything is bad for it, as it seems to me," answered Dalton with a laugh that only partially concealed his irritation. "However, I have no doubt your science will effect a cure. If you will allow me, I will take that mixture home with me, by-the-bye—and likewise the laudanum."

"By all means," answered his host; "I will just go and put them up for you while you take another glass of wine."

The doctor was some time absent; yet Dalton did not take his wine, but sat with his head forward in an attitude of eager expectation, listening: the house was small, and the partitions thin, and he could hear the other moving about in the surgery, the chink of bottles, and even—as he fancied—the pouring of some liquor into a phial, as he had already seen the other pour it. But as the returning steps came along the passage, the cloud

cleared off his face, and it once more wore a smile.

“My dear doctor, this is a plot: you must certainly have intended me to take more liquor than is good for me, that you have left me so long with your wine. What have you been about?”

“Nay, my dear sir, a half-starved apothecary who sells poisons must be careful of his measures. Here is the mixture and the laudanum; pray, be careful of it, for there is enough there to kill half the parish.”

“Thanks,” said Dalton, disposing the neat little parcels in his pockets. “There is but one thing more, Curzon: it is a delicate matter; but between old friends there need be no fanciful scruples. Please to let me know what I am indebted to you?”

“What? To Robert Curzon, F.R.C.S. John Dalton, Esq., for attendance upon his wife and family. Pooh, my dear sir; that will go in at Christmas. There is nothing we doctors dislike so much as going into details; it is as bad as taxing a bill is to an attorney.”

“But I particularly wish this little matter to be separate. I would not, for example, have my wife know that I came to consult you professionally on any account, and I have other reasons for secrecy.”

“Very good. You are a rich man, or I would not take a penny. Let me see, if I were Dr. Jefferson, I should call it a special appointment, and charge you two guineas, which would cover the cold beef and sherry nicely: being only a general practitioner, I don’t think I can screw more than one out of you.”

“I can’t imagine how you doctors manage to live,” said Dalton, producing his purse. “You seem to me to take more pains for less money than any other class of men.”

“But this is two pounds. I am afraid the whole valley has not so much change in it as you will require.”

“But then there is the mixture, Curzon.”

“Nay; *that* can surely go down in the general account, my good sir. Pride is not my weakness, but I can’t sell you threepennyworth of sal-volatile across my dinner-table.”

“Why, what is the difference? I am astonished at so sensible a man being so thin-skinned. Now we are quits for to-day’s business, so let us say no more about it.”

“*What?* Do you wish it to be understood, then, that I have sold you eighteen-shillings-and-ninepence-worth of laudanum? Mantua’s law is death to any one who sells one-half of the dose. If

you are really serious in wishing to keep the whole transaction private, here is the proper change. I wish it was the general custom among folks in this neighbourhood to settle with their doctor so promptly."

The settlement was indeed ridiculous, considering the smallness of the amount, and the relations between the two men, and they both endeavoured to treat it as more or less of a joke. But as a matter of fact, the affair was very embarrassing to both parties, and much more so than if they had been dealing with any important sum. Doctor and patient were equally pleased when the interview was ended, and they took leave of one another at the front door; the former to start upon his "rounds" on horseback, which his friend's visit had unusually delayed; and the latter to return to Riverside by the way he had come.

"I have left no footsteps behind me," muttered Dalton to himself with a sigh of satisfaction, as he strode quickly up the valley; "and I have persuaded Curzon to believe the thing I wished. What rubbish is all this pretence of science, who can have a theory thus fostered upon her as easily as a conjurer forces a card upon a child."

CHAPTER XV.

ON BOARD THE "MARY."

"JENNY," whispered Jeff, as he walked beside the little invalid carriage, in which she was wont to be conveyed when there was the least risk of fatigue, on its way to the boat-house, "what do you think of Holt's get-up?"

"It is ravishing," was her enthusiastic reply.

The remark was called forth by a suit of rough blue cloth, adapted for marine purposes, and a hard shiny hat, such as one expects to see surrounded by a ribbon, embroidered with the name of a ship. It was not, however, so surrounded; and the hue of the clothes, though of unmistakable azure, was very modest in tone. Mr. Holt's attire would, in short, perhaps have altogether escaped censure, had it not been so undeniably new; but as it was, it gave the idea of premeditation. This gentleman, as Jenny had averred, had a special suit for every occasion; not only morning-dress and evening-dress, and

driving-dress and riding-dress, but even a particular attire for croquet; and now it appeared that he had not come wholly unprovided with even a yachting costume. So far as his tailor could do it, he was, in fact, equal to any situation that country-life could place him in, and it was obvious that he had been in none of them—nor in the suits to match—before.

“There is one thing,” continued Jenny, “that I must see before I die, and for which reason I wish it was winter. I yearn to behold that man in scarlet, with top-boots and a hunting-cap: that he has got them in his portmanteau, only waiting the opportunity for production, I am confident.”

“He would look even more like a monkey than than he does now,” observed Jeff, contemptuously.

“Not a bit of it. You wrong him there, Jeff. He would only look too new, like the gentlemen sportsmen who ride on horseback in the tailors’ shops in Regent Street. What irritates me is his being always so spick and span, so offensively pat with the occasion. I think, however, Mrs. Campden likes it.”

“Why on earth should she like it?”

“Well, she feels it a personal compliment that he should have made such extensive preparations for his visit to ‘Riverside. His only mistake has

been that he did not provide a suit of Lincoln green for the archery-ground."

Certainly his hostess seemed unusually affable to Mr. Holt as he walked between her and Mrs. Dalton down to the river, while Mr. Campden preceded them with the two girls.

"Have you ever been in a steam-yacht?" inquired she, with an approving glance at his metal buttons.

"No, madam." He always called her "madam," and she was not displeased at it. It seemed to mark the difference of social rank between one of her exalted position in the county and a mere stockbroker.

"I have been in other yachts often enough; indeed, I may say too often, for I am a very indifferent sailor. I have several friends who are yachtsmen, but it is not everybody who can offer one a cruise in a steam-yacht."

"I think you will find the *Mary* very comfortable," answered Mrs. Campden, languidly. "It is named, as you may guess, after my daughter. She christened it, when it was first launched, with a bottle of the best champagne. For my own part, I thought it very extravagant, but my husband would have it so."

"It should not have been dry champagne," said Mr. Holt, with a little smile.

"Why not?" inquired Mrs. Campden. "It would have been better—because cheaper—than Clicquot."

"No doubt, no doubt; I was only referring to the irrelevance of christening a ship, you know, an article intended for the water, with *dry* champagne."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Campden, coldly; "it was a joke."

"It was a very little one," said Mr. Holt apologetically; then, sensible that he had made a quotation not exactly from the classics, he blushed, and with great earnestness asserted that he was entirely of his hostess's opinion as to the wicked waste of using Clicquot for any such ridiculous ceremony as christening a vessel.

"There was, however, nothing ridiculous about christening the *Mary*," observed Mrs. Campden, chillingly. "Lord Wapshot—who is our lord-lieutenant—was so good as to honour the occasion with his presence; and we had three or four hundred guests in a great tent, from Edgington's, upon the lawn."

"It must have been a splendid spectacle," said Mr. Holt, respectfully.

But the lady of the house was not to be mitigated; she had been joked with by a stockbroker,

and was resolved to resent it with becoming severity.

"My dear Edith," said she, addressing her other companion, "what a pity it is your husband cannot accompany us this morning: there is nobody like him for making an expedition of this kind go off."

"He said he would perhaps join us in the course of the afternoon," said Mrs. Dalton. "I am sure he regrets not being able to come, as much as you are good enough to say you regret his absence."

"Well, I don't quite agree with you there, Edith," answered the hostess, drily. "I must confess that I think, if Mr. Dalton wanted to come, he *would* have come. What do *you* say, Mr. Holt? Do you think that he is so wrapped up in business as to allow it to interfere with what is really more pleasant to him?"

Mrs. Campden was one of those uncompromising women who, if they were common, would make social life intolerable. If not absolutely delighting in battle, she would not go a hair-breadth out of her way to avoid it; she knew that she would get no assent from Mrs. Dalton, yet if she had been alone with her, it is probable that she would still have hazarded the same opinion; as it was, she turned to her male guest, reckoning confidently that he would purchase his own forgiveness at the

sacrifice of his friend. Here, however, she was mistaken.

“Indeed, madam, I cannot agree with you. Mr. Dalton has not only an aptitude for business, which, considering he has only taken to it comparatively late in life, is surprising, but I have never known him postpone any matter of importance to mere pleasure.”

Mrs. Campden sniffed incredulously. “Ah, you men always hang by one another,” she said, “when one comes to talk of the great art and mystery called business, which you would have us believe no woman can understand; but I have known some very ordinary people who have succeeded in it uncommonly well.”

Poor Mr. Holt! he really looked very “ordinary” when she said that. He would have flattered himself, if it had been possible, that she was alluding to Mr. Campden; but the glance with which she accompanied her remark made that impossible. He hoped at least to meet with gratitude from Mrs. Dalton, to win whose favour he had thus boldly defied their hostess in defending Dalton; but she only favoured him with a forced smile. The whole subject of business in connection with her husband was painful to her; she felt, too,

that he needed no defence, and least of all from Mr. Richard Holt.

By this time they had reached the boat-house, from which they were to be rowed to the yacht, which was waiting for them with her steam up in mid-stream. It was a beautiful craft, fitted up solely with an eye to comfort. The smoke and steam, and all the disagreeables, were confined to the after-part of the vessel; and the fore-part, consisting of a raised deck and highly decorated cabin, was admirably adapted for a party of pleasure. Upon the deck they all took their seats, except Mr. Campden, to whom confinement of any sort was disagreeable, and who paced up and down, not so much like a sea-captain on his marine domain as a hyena in a cage. It was very good-natured of him to have proposed the expedition, for it was not at all to his taste. He would have much preferred to be roaming about his territorial possessions with an axe in his hand, cutting down trees at random, to which occupation a man who has exchanged town for country, late in life, is pretty sure to condemn himself. He was wont to term it "thinning the timber," until Dalton had given another name to this amusement of his friend—"raising money on the estate."

The river-voyage was very beautiful, with craggy hills on one side, and on the other rich meadows and woodlands, which "marched," as Mrs. Campden took occasion to remark, "with the Riverside property;" but it was of short duration. In a little while they reached the lake, a broad sheet of open water, with no great picturesqueness to recommend it. Bleabarrow mere is inferior both in grandeur and loveliness to even the least attractive of the Cumberland and Westmoreland lakes; it is high placed, but the shores are low and barren. It is, in fact, surrounded by moorland. When the first ebullition of spirits that always accompanies the start upon a pleasure-trip had subsided, even the young people began to feel a sense of boredom. It is possible that salt-water may have an enlivening effect—indeed, it must be so, or only the very poorest persons, with something solid to gain by it, would surely commit themselves *twice* to a long voyage—but it is certain that expeditions upon fresh-water, unless it be on a river, when you can land if you please, soon become excessively tedious. People get tired of one another's company afloat in one-tenth of the time that they do on shore. The air and the water together have also a sedative effect upon that large class of persons who are charitably described as "having no great resources within

themselves"—in plain English, who do not know what it is to think.

In half an hour, Mrs. Campden was giving more assents by nods to the opinions expressed by her companions than she had given by words for the last six months. If you had taxed her with being asleep, she would doubtless have indignantly denied it; but it was true, nevertheless. Her husband, who openly confessed that he did not "care for scenery," was conversing, cigar in mouth, with the ship's engineer about vertical and horizontal movements. Mrs. Dalton, who sat beside her hostess, was not, indeed, like her, in the land of dreams, but she was scarcely conscious of what was taking place around her; her thoughts were busy with the sad future that was awaiting—and so immediately—her dear ones, but of which they had as yet received no hint. Their lively talk, though she heard not the words, jarred upon her ear; their laughter smote her heart only less sorely than their misery would presently smite it. In a few days—in less than a week—they would leave Riverside for what had been their home, but which was now, in fact, no longer theirs, and then the news of their ruin must needs be broken to them. In a few months another child would be born to her—the consciousness

of which is of itself depressing to most women—heir to its father's fallen fortunes, and a new burden for them to support. Physically, she was far from well. An abiding sense of weakness was always present with her, which gave her apprehensions for the future, when her time of trial should come; but they were not apprehensions upon her own account. Persons of her pure, self-sacrificing sort are the last in the world to entertain a high opinion of their own merits; but if common-sense be allowed to enter into the region of theological speculation at all, they are probably conscious that things must needs be well with them when they have shuffled off this mortal coil; that the end of their labours—even though they ignore all thoughts of reward—must needs be good and gracious; at all events, they have no fear, save the fear of being taken from those they love, and who have need of their love. Oh, deep and terrible mystery of life, wherein such beings as these suffer and perish, while the vile and selfish prosper and live on!

In Mrs. Dalton's face, indeed, could be read nothing of this; a serene cheerfulness pervaded it, not only to common eyes, but even to those which affection had rendered keen; but she felt herself unequal to any attempt to promote hilarity. The

duty, therefore, of making the time pass agreeably devolved solely upon the "young people" and Mr. Holt, and the latter had by no means been formed by nature expressly for this vocation.

"We are getting deadly dull," said Jenny presently, after a meritorious struggle or two to "lift" the conversation, which had done more harm than good, and indeed left it a corpse. "What do you say to 'Lights' or 'Twenty Questions?'"

These were drawing-room games which were sometimes played at Riverside, and with which all the party were familiar. In the former, two persons select a word of various meaning, and talk of it aloud under its various aspects, though taking care not to name it, while the others guess, from the "lights" thus thrown upon it, what the word is. Even then it is not mentioned; but whoever thinks he has discovered it joins in the conversation, and is admitted into it; permanently or not, according to the correctness or otherwise of his surmise. So one by one the whole company join in, till some unhappy wight, not apt for the amusement, finds himself out in the cold, the solitary listener to a general conversation of which he does not understand the drift. Mr. Geoffrey Derwent, great as he was at croquet, unrivalled in the archery-ground, and by no means despicable at the billiard-table,

very often found himself at "lights" in this unsociable position. Mr. Holt, on the other hand, though by no means good at games that require dexterity, had rather shone at "lights," though, it is true, in a very inferior way to John Dalton, who was so ready at them, that, as Kate said, "you might just as well tell papa at once."

"I think drawing-room games out of doors are slow," said Jeff, decisively.

"But they can't make us slower than we are," answered Jenny, "since we have come to a full stop."

"I shall be very glad to play at 'lights,' or anything else, to promote the general hilarity," said Mr. Holt, modestly.

"That is a very large order, 'the general hilarity,'" muttered Jeff to Jenny.

"It is not so much the promotion of hilarity, Mr. Holt, as it seems to me," said she, "as the avoidance of utter collapse that we have to provide for. We have no idea, doubtless, how stupid we have been ourselves for the last half-hour, but everybody has noticed it in his neighbour."

"I have not noticed it in *you*, Miss Jenny," returned Mr. Holt, gallantly. "I have only observed, as in Macaulay's case, that there were occasionally 'flashes of silence.' What do *you* say, Miss Kate? Are you for games or no games?"

Kate did not like Mr. Holt, but she had looked upon him with less disfavour ever since he had endeavoured to take the blame off Jeff's shoulders in the matter of the guide race; and she thought Jenny was hard upon the man. True, he was not quite up to the standard of "a gentleman;" but that seemed to her rather a reason why they who were his superiors should deal tenderly with him. Moreover, she was resolved not to "snub" him, ever since Mary had dropped that unpleasant hint about his devotion to her on the night of the charades, lest her coldness should be laid to that account. Thus specially appealed to, she gave her voice for games, and they were commenced accordingly. Jenny and Mary had the word—though the two sisters would have carried on the conversation better—and the *rôle* of the rest was to listen.

"It is curious," said Jenny, "that you generally either see them in great numbers, or else only one at a time."

"Nay," returned Mary, "I have often seen two and four of them, though seldom three, when their object has been to make us good."

"Or perhaps only goody-goody, which is quite another thing," observed Jenny.

"Mamma, however, believes in their efficacy implicitly," said Mary.

"I hope so, my dear," observed Mrs. Campden, awakened by this reference to herself; and understanding dimly that she was called upon to endorse some moral or religious principle.

"I am afraid you have no right to join in our conversation, my dear Mrs. Campden," said Jenny.

"They are playing at 'lights,'" explained Kate, apologetically.

"My dear Kate, I am perfectly well aware of that," returned the hostess, with dignity. It was a maxim with her not only never to own herself wrong but even mistaken.

"But you know you have not guessed it, mamma," urged Mary; "and it's contrary to the rules to talk to us unless you have."

"Your mother does not even keep one of them in her house, I believe," continued the audacious Jenny, whose character was faulty in this particular—that she had no reverence for those she did not respect. She was impatient of pretence of any kind, and would rap her hostess's knuckles as soon as she would have rapped those of anybody else. What business had the woman to insist upon it she was awake when she was asleep?

"No," said Mary; "we do not keep one at present, though we did so at one time."

"Yes, that is very curious," observed Jenny,

thoughtfully. "The poor keep none of them. The moderately rich keep one of them. The rich keep none of them; but the very rich indeed—quite magnificent people, that is—keep lots of them."

"This is like a riddle of the Sphinx," exclaimed Jeff, despairingly.

"And you are not the *Œdipus* to guess it," retorted Jenny. "As it happens, however, it is not a riddle, though I have seen it in a charade."

"And on the stage," said Mary. "They look lovely on the stage."

"Yes; but I think the gentlemen admire them more than the ladies. I am sure, if you were to appear as one, Mary, they would admire you immensely."

Mary blushed and tittered; and Kate put in, "They were very useful to the ladies, however, in old times, were they not?"

"Who is this young person?" inquired Jenny, with icy gravity, of her coadjutor. "Do you think she has a right to join in our private conversation?"

"Let us inquire," said Mary. "When were they useful to ladies, miss?"

"In muddy weather," rejoined Kate, and thereby established her position. There were now three to carry on the talk instead of four.

“Have you ever known them to change colour?” inquired Jenny, with a comical look.

“No,” said Mary. “I have known them of different colours, but never to change.”

“Nor I,” said Kate. “Give us further particulars.”

“Well, I have known those to which Mrs. Campden is attached to be red, and yet occasionally not red.”

“Are they not often mentioned in romances?” inquired Mrs. Dalton, smiling.

“Mamma has guessed it!” cried Kate, delightedly. “Well done, mamma!”

“I am not sure,” said Jenny, severely. “We must not encourage rash speculation. What writer of romance is mostly associated with them?”

“Sir Walter Scott.”

“Very true; yet he has not portrayed the most popular—and the largest—of all.”

“I have got it!” cried Jeff, triumphantly. “The largest of all is capital.”

“Who is this noisy youth?” inquired Jenny, contemptuously. “I cannot think he belongs to us.”

“Yes, he does,” persisted Jeff, stoutly; “the largest of all was apt to go to sleep a good deal.—Mr. Holt has not guessed it yet.”

“If Mr. Holt’s literary sympathies were con-

finer to a single book, as yours are, Jeff," said Kate, reprovingly, "he would have guessed it as easily as you."

"Oh, I *see*!" cried Mr. Holt, forgetting his humiliation in the consciousness that Kate had been kind to him. "I certainly ought to have recognised the Fat Boy."

"I don't see it *now*," argued Mrs. Campden, who, to do her justice, was seldom the last left in ignorance of the desired word. "Of course a boy changes colour—though rarely, unless he's bilious; however much it may be expected of him, one never sees one blush." She never missed a chance of hitting at poor Jeff; but this time he had the advantage of her.

"The word is not quite 'boy,' madam, though very like it," explained he, with elaborate politeness; "it is 'page;' which, when in the form of a tract, is occasionally *not* read. Moderately rich people keep *one*——"

"I don't think it's at all a good word," interrupted Mrs. Campden, curtly; "I think it stupid."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Mary; "I think it's an excellent word."

"Uncle George, do, pray, come here," cried Jenny, who, having herself invented the word, was by no means willing to submit to the voice of

detraction. "We want an independent opinion from you."

"My dear girl, I have not possessed such a thing these twenty years," replied Mr. Campden, coming forward with his cigar.

Mrs. Campden bit her lips, and so did the young people, though from a different cause. It was with difficulty that they restrained themselves from laughter.

"We want to hear your opinion of the word 'page' for lights," continued Jenny. "Do you think it a good word, or not?"

"It is not a bad word, so far as I know," replied Mr. Campden, comically.

"Now, do be serious, Uncle George. Is it well chosen or ill chosen? Somebody says it's stupid."

"I should think that was the person who had not guessed it," observed the referee.

"*Thank* you," said Mrs. Campden, icily. "It appears to me that you have not learned politeness from the society of your stoker yonder."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the unhappy man, "how was I to know that it was you, my dear? You are generally the very first to guess these things."

"Please either to put your cigar out, or to

return to your friend in the engine-room," was the uncompromising reply; "ladies do not like tobacco-smoke puffed into their faces, Mr. Campden."

"On board steam-yachts, my dear," rejoined he, good-naturedly, "smoking is always allowed, except abaft the funnel. Nevertheless, to hear is to obey." And, with a salaam to his lady and master, intended to be eastern in its profundity, Mr. Campden retired, only to re-appear, however, in a few minutes, fresh and smiling, at the luncheon-table. Under the influence of good viands and champagne, the little company, which had been getting somewhat limp and out of spirits, soon revived. The great prescription for a water-party is what Dr. Curzon termed "constant support"—a luncheon should be always going; and, so far as the young people were concerned, the excursion, after all, proved a considerable success. Mrs. Dalton's eyes, however, in vain swept the dreary moorland for her husband; he came not, and, her heart foreboded, was too sad to come. It never struck her, as it would have struck some wives, that he might have "made an effort," as she had done, and helped her to endure the happiness and laughter of the rest by his presence. Since he could not be merry, she was glad to think that he was spared the pain she

suffered; but she pined to be with him, that her love might comfort him. What was he doing all alone at Riverside? Twice had Mrs. Campden addressed her, though, it must be allowed, in a very low voice, without diverting her attention from this melancholy thought.

"My dear Edith, are you asleep?" said she at last, a little sharply.

"A thousand pardons, Julia. I suppose the motion of the vessel made me drowsy."

"It must have made you blind as well as deaf, my dear," whispered her hostess, "if you have not noticed the very marked attentions that somebody has been paying to your Kate all day. Of course she is well able to take care of herself; but, in my opinion, it is a piece of downright impertinence on his part."

"I have observed nothing," answered Mrs. Dalton, her delicate pale face flushing in spite of herself. "Are you referring to Mr. Holt?"

"Well, I suppose I am not referring to Geoffrey, my dear; *that* would surely be a little too absurd. I say, considering the sort of footing on which Mr. Holt has come down here—not, I must say, altogether with *my* approbation—as your husband's business-friend, it is most impertinent in him to presume in that way. We have every reason, how-

ever, to believe that Kate has a proper contempt for the man."

"Well, I think we may be assured, at least, that Kate has not fallen in love with him," said Mrs. Dalton, smiling. She had quite recovered herself now, and would have been more than a match for her hostess on such a topic a month ago. It is true she no longer felt on equal terms with her, but then the other did not know it.

"In love with him!" repeated Mrs. Campden, scornfully. "I should as soon have imputed to her an attachment to the footman."

"Mr. Holt is your guest, Julia," returned Mrs. Dalton, stiffly. Her anger was not stirred upon Mr. Holt's account at all, and Mrs. Campden knew it, and drew in her horns at once.

"Well, of course the footman is an exaggeration, my dear; but the man has no sort of right to lift his eyes so high."

"Of course, such a match would be ill-assorted," returned Mrs. Dalton. "To begin with, there is a very great disparity in years."

"Nay, that would surely be a trifling objection, compared with others. He is not on the same level in society, nor anything like it; while, even as to his wealth, there is no knowing, with these speculating people, whether they may not be

beggars to-morrow; and it is no discredit to dear Kate, considering her bringing-up and reasonable expectations, if I say that she is totally unfitted for any other life than one of assured ease and affluence."

"I hope that is not so," said Mrs. Dalton, hesitatingly. And here it was almost upon her tongue to tell why it was she hoped better things of Kate, of the necessity that had arisen that Kate and all her children should fit themselves for quite another life than one of affluence; but her companion's impatience cut her short.

"Oh, nonsense, Edith. I do sincerely trust you will never encourage her to throw herself away upon a poor man. Indeed, I know no one—except perhaps my own daughter—less likely to be happy with such. Of course, riches cannot insure contentment; but it is quite as certain that poverty, when it falls upon those who have been used to riches, produces discontent, peevishness, coldness of heart, and in the end, often downright dislike for those—even when they are not in fault—with whom we are compelled to live. There is a deal of nonsense talked on the other side of the question; but it is rather a suspicious circumstance that all the eloquence in favour of poverty comes from people who are either very rich, or not in

a position to feel the want of money. You never hear a man with a large family, for example, preaching up the delights of a small income."

"But when you had a small income yourself, Julia—or one comparatively small—you were just as happy as you are at present."

It was now Mrs. Campden's turn to blush, which she did very violently, though somewhat partially. She was one of those women who blush in patches, and especially on the forehead, the ears, and the tip of the nose.

"Of course, we have had our day of small things, Edith, as I have never sought to conceal; but that was before we occupied our present position in"—she was going to say "the county," but she modestly exchanged it for—"society. Having once attained to that, it would be a great bitterness to fall even to the place that I once occupied, perhaps contentedly enough."

"Yet, you would surely not dislike, on that account, those with whom you were compelled to live—your husband, for example—even though, as you put it, he might have been the cause of your calamity?"

"I honestly tell you, Edith, I should like him none the better for it; and should not certainly expect that Mary would have the same respect

for him. A man who, having once established himself and family, risks, I do not say their means of livelihood—for *that* would be downright selfish wickedness—but their (I know no other word for it) ‘position,’ by speculation, loses not only their money, but their dutiful affection and regard, and, in my opinion deserves to lose them. Of course Mr. Holt yonder, with no family ties, may do as he pleases; but what would the world say of your husband, for example, if he allowed himself to be persuaded by him to enter into any dangerous enterprise?”

“Well, what *would* the world say?” inquired Mrs. Dalton, looking quickly up into her companion’s face.

“Why, it would say some very hard things,” answered the other, not without some signs of discomposure. “Even in a supposititious case, one would not like to say what things; but my point is, that though you yourself might forgive him, your children would endorse what would be said.”

“And in your opinion they would be justified in so doing?” asked Mrs. Dalton, coldly.

“In my opinion they would at least be excusable, Edith. You are not annoyed with me, I hope, for speaking my mind. I am taking, of course, only a general case. I am quite sure Mr.

Dalton is the very last man in the world to commit such a piece of folly; but my argument is, that if any one in his position did commit it, it would be a crime."

Here the *Mary* grounded, as she was accustomed to do, on every other trip, some yards from her proper anchorage in the river. Taking into account the interest of money sunk in the purchase, and the expense of her maintenance, each of these rare excursions to Bleabarrow mere cost her owner about five-and-twenty pounds. But his wife at least did not begrudge it. No other family in the county could boast of the possession of a steam-yacht, except the Campdens.

END OF VOL. I.





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